



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

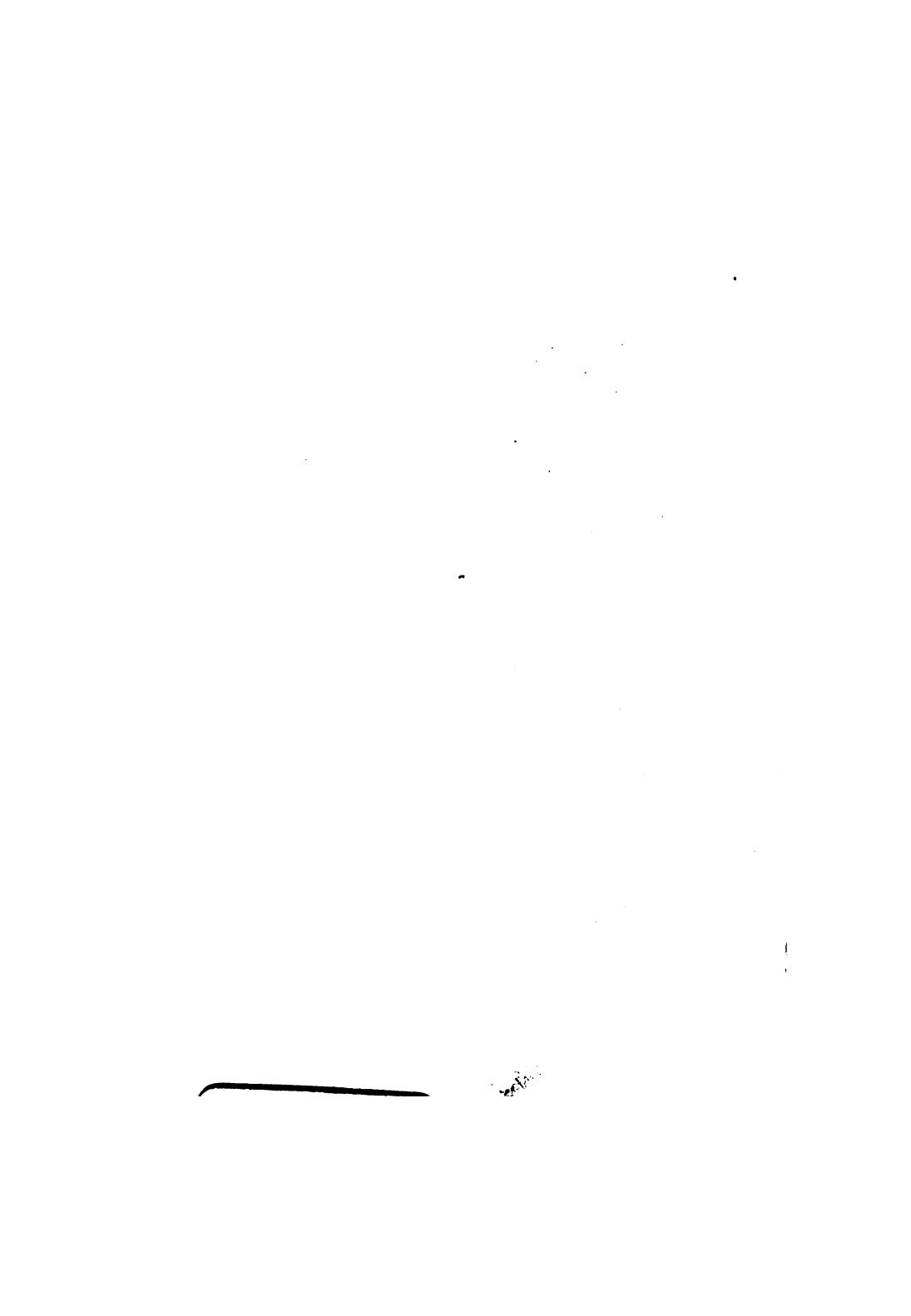
NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07497087 6

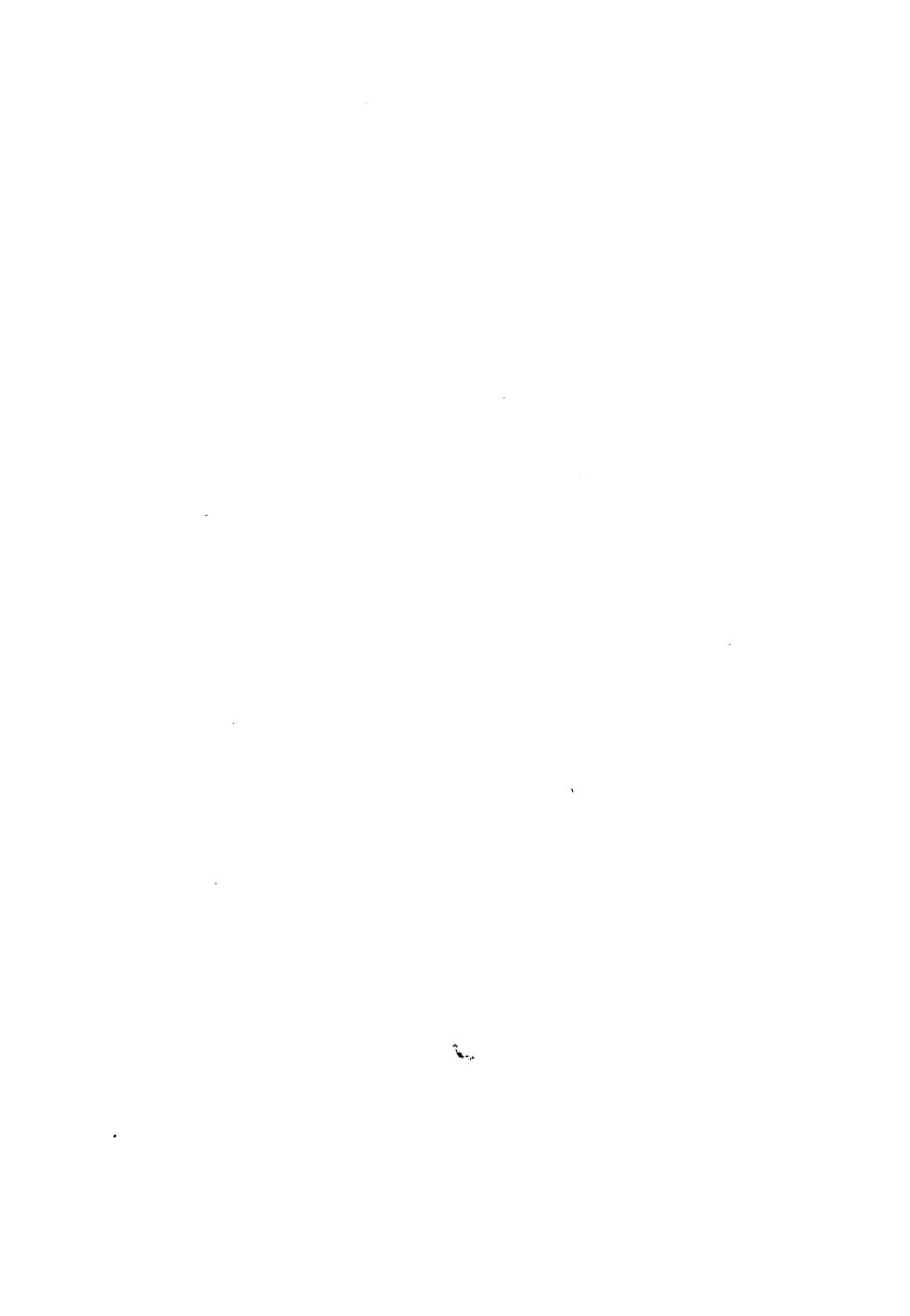
DICTIONARIES

JAMES HUNEKER

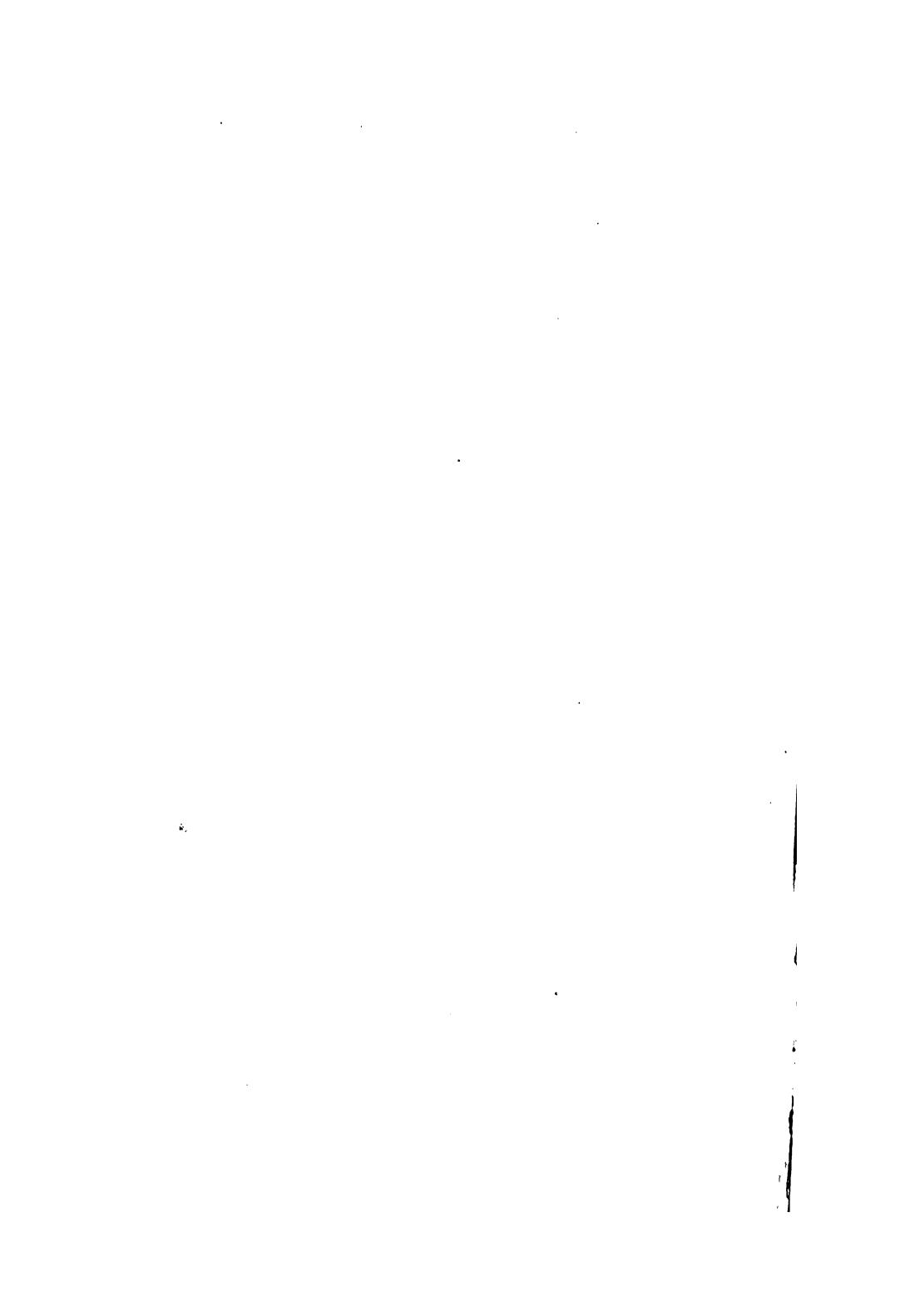


108

108
HUNTER
C. CO.



VISIONARIES



VISIONARIES

BY

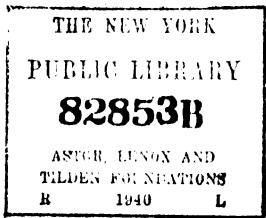
JAMES HUNEKER

J'aime les nuages . . . là bas . . . !

BAUDELAIRE

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1905
A.B.P.



COPYRIGHT, 1905, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published October, 1905.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

A

MON CHER MAÎTRE

REMY DE GOURMONT

PARIS

40x917



CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. A MASTER OF COBWEBS	1
II. THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN	23
III. THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH	44
IV. REBELS OF THE MOON	64
V. THE SPIRAL ROAD	80
VI. A MOCK SUN	110
VII. ANTICHRIST	135
VIII. THE ETERNAL DUEL	145
IX. THE ENCHANTED YODLER	149
X. THE THIRD KINGDOM	168
XI. THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD	188
XII. THE TRAGIC WALL	203
XIII. A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION	227
XIV. HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS	249
XV. THE CURSORY LIGHT	266
XVI. AN IRON FAN	278
XVII. THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN	289
XVIII. THE TUNE OF TIME	309
XIX. NADA	326
XX. PAN	332

VISIONARIES

I

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

I

ALIXE VAN KUYP sat in the first-tier box presented to her husband with the accustomed heavy courtesy of the Société Harmonique. She went early to the hall that she might hear the entire music-making of the evening—Van Kuyp's tone-poem, *Sordello*, was on the programme between a Weber overture and a Beethoven symphony, an unusual honour for a young American composer. If she had gone late, it would have seemed an affectation, she reasoned. Her husband kept within doors; she could tell him all. And then, was there not Elvard Rentgen?

She regretted that she had invited the Parisian critic to her box. It happened at a *soirée*, where he showed his savage profile among admiring musical lambs. But he was never punctual at musical affairs. This consoled Alixe.

I



VISIONARIES

Perhaps he would forget her impulsive, foolish speech,—“without him the music would fall upon unheeding ears,—he, who interpreted art for the multitude, the holder of the critical key that unlocked masterpieces.” She had felt the banality of her compliment as she uttered it, and she knew the man who listened, his glance incredulous, his mouth smiling, could not be deceived. Rentgen had been too many years in the candy shop to care for sweets. She recalled her mean little blush as he twisted his pointed, piebald beard with long, fat fingers and leisurely traversed—his were the measuring eyes of an architect—her face, her hair, her neck, and finally, stared at her ears until they burned like a child’s cheek in frost time.

Alix Van Kuyp was a large woman, with a conscientious head and gray eyes. As she waited, she realized that it was one of her timid nights, when colour came easily and temper ran at its lowest ebb. She had begged Van Kuyp to cancel the habit of not listening to his own music except at rehearsal, and, annoyed by his stubbornness, neglected to tell him of the other invitation. The house was quite full when the music began. Uneasiness overtook her as the Oberon slowly stole upon her consciousness. She forgot Rentgen; a more disquieting problem presented itself. Richard’s music—how would it sound in the company of the old masters, those masters who were newer than Wagner, newer than Strauss and the “moderns”!



A MASTER OF COBWEBS

She envisaged her husband — small, slim, with his bushy red hair, big student's head — familiarly locking arms with Weber and Beethoven in the hall of fame. No, the picture did not convince her. She was his severest censor. Not one of the professional critics could put their fingers on Van Kuyp's weak spots — "his sore music," as he jestingly called it — so surely as his wife. She had studied ; she had even played the violin in public ; but she gave up her virtuosa ambitions for the man she had married during their student years in Germany. Now the old doubts came to life as the chivalric tones of Weber rose to her sharpened senses. Why couldn't Richard —

The door in the anteroom opened, her guest entered. Alixe was not dismayed. She left her seat and, closing the curtains, greeted him.

The overture was ending as Rentgen sat down beside her in the intimate little chamber, lighted by a solitary electric bulb.

" You are always thoughtful," she murmured.

" My dear lady, mine is the honour. And if you do not care, can't we hear the music of your young man — " he smiled, she thought, acidly — " here ? If I sit outside, the world will say — we have to be careful of our unsmirched reputations — we poor critics and slave-drivers of the deaf."

She drew her hand gently away. He had held it, playfully tapping it as he slowly delivered himself in short sentences. He was a Dane, but his French and English were with-

VISIONARIES

out trace of accent; certain intonations alone betrayed his Scandinavian origin.

Alix could not refuse, for the moment he finished speaking she heard a too familiar motive, the ponderous phrase in the brass choir which Van Kuyp intended as the thematic label for his hero, "Sordello."

"Ah, there's your Browning in tone for you," whispered the critic. She wished him miles away. The draperies were now slightly parted and into the room filtered the grave, languorous accents of the new tone-poem. Her eyes were fixed by Rentgen's. His expression changed; with nostrils dilated like a hunter scenting prey, his rather inert, cold features became transfigured; he was the man who listened, the cruel judge who sentenced. And she hoped, also the kind friend who would consider the youth and inexperience of the culprit. To the morbidly acute hearing of the woman, the music had a ring of hollow sonority after the denser packed phrases of Weber.

She had read Sordello with her husband until she thought its meaning was as clear as high noon. By the critic's advice the subject had been selected for musical treatment. Sordello's overweening spiritual pride—"gate-vein of this heart's blood of Lombardy"—appealed to Van Kuyp. The stress of souls, the welter of cross-purposes which begirt the youthful dreamer, his love for Palma, and his swift death when all the world thrust upon him its joys—here were mo-

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

tives, indeed, for any musician of lofty aim and sympathetic imagination.

Alix recollects the interminable arguments, the snatches of poetry, the hasty rushes to the keyboard; a composer was in travail. At the end of a year, Rentgen professed his satisfaction; Van Kuyp stood on the highroad to fame. Of that there could be no doubt; Elvard Rentgen would say so in print. Alix had been reassured —

Yet sitting now within the loop of her husband's music it suddenly became insipid, futile, and lacking in those enchantments for which she yearned. Her eyes dropped to the shapely hands meekly folded in her lap, dropped because the bold, interrogative expression on Rentgen's face disturbed her. She knew, as any woman would have known, that he admired her — but was he not Richard's friend? His glance enveloped her with piteous mockery.

The din was tremendous. After passages of dark music, in which the formless ugly reigned, occurred the poetic duel between Sordello and Eglamor at Palma's Court of Love. But why all this stress and fury? On the pianoforte the delicate episode sounded gratefully; with the thick riotous orchestration came a disillusioning transformation. There was noise without power, there was sensuality that strove to imitate the tenderness of passion; and she had fancied it a cloudy garden of love. Alix raised an involuntary hand to her ear.

VISIONARIES

"Yes," whispered the critic, "I warned him not to use his colours with a trowel. His theme is not big enough to stand it." He lifted thin eyebrows and to her overheated brain was an unexpected Mephisto. Then the music whirled her away to Italy; the love scene of Palma and Sordello. It should have been the apex of the work.

"Sounds too much like Tschaikowsky's *Francesca da Rimini*," interrupted Rentgen. She was annoyed.

"Why didn't you tell Van Kuyp before he scored the work?" she demanded, her long gray eyes beginning to blacken.

"I did, my dear lady, I did. But you know what musicians are—" He shrugged a conclusion with his narrow shoulders. Alix coldly regarded him. There was something new and dangerous in his attitude to her husband's music this evening.

Her heart began to beat heavily. What if her suspicions were but the advance guard of a painful truth! What if this keen analyst of other men's ideas — she dared not finish the thought. With a sluggish movement the music uncoiled itself like a huge boa about to engulf a tiny rabbit. The simile forced itself against her volition; all this monstrous preparation for a — rabbit! In a concert-hall the poetic idea of the tone-poem was petty. And the churning of the orchestra, foaming hysteria of the strings, bellowing of the brass — would they never cease!

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

Such an insane chase after a rabbit! Yes, she said the word to herself and found her lips carved into a hard smile, which she saw reflected as in a trick mirror upon the face of Elvard Rentgen. *He* understood.

Of little avail Sordello's frantic impotencies. She saw through the rhetorical trickeries of the music, weighed its cheap splendours, realized the mediocrity of this second-rate poet turned symphonist. Image after image pressed upon her brain, each more pessimistic, more depressing than its predecessor. Alixe could have wept. Her companion placed his hand on her arm. His fingers burned; she moved, but she felt his will controlling her mood. With high relief she heard the music end. There was conventional applause. Alixe restlessly peered into the auditorium. Again she saw opera-glasses turned toward the box. "Our good friends," she rather bitterly thought. Rentgen recognized her mental turmoil.

"Don't worry," he said soothingly. "It will be all right to-morrow morning. What I write will make the fortune of the composition." He did not utter this vaingloriously, but as a man who stated simple truth. She gazed at him, her timidity and nervousness returning in full tide.

"I know I am overwrought. I should be thankful. But—but, isn't it deception—I mean, will it be fair to conceal from Richard the real condition of affairs?" He took her hand.

VISIONARIES

"Spoken like a true wife," he gayly exclaimed. "My dear friend, there will be no deception. Only encouragement, a little encouragement. As for deceiving a composer, telling him that he may not be so wonderful as he thinks—that's impossible. I know these star-shouldering souls, these farmers of phantasms who exist in a world by themselves. It would be a pity to let in the cold air of reality—anyhow Van Kuyp has some talent."

Like lifting mists revealing the treacherous borders of a masked pool, she felt this speech with its ironic innuendo. She flushed, her vanity irritated. Rentgen saw her eyes contract.

"Let us go when the symphony begins," she begged, "I can't talk to any one in my present bad humour; and to hear Beethoven would drive me mad—now."

"I don't wonder," remarked her companion, consolingly. Alixe winced.

The silver-cold fire of an undecided moon was abroad in the sky and rumours of spring filled the air. They parted at a fiacre. He told her he would call the next afternoon, and she nodded an unforgiving head. It was her turn to be disagreeable.

In his music room, Van Kuyp read a volume of verse. He did not hear his wife enter. It pained her when she saw his serious face with its undistinguished features and dogged expression. No genius this, was her hasty ver-

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

dict, as she quickly went to him and put a hand on his head. It was her hand now that was hot. He raised eyes, dolent with dreams.

"Well?" he queried.

"You are a curious man!" she said wonderingly. "Aren't you interested in the news about your symphonic poem?" He smiled the smile of the fatuous elect. "I imagine it went all right," he languidly replied. "I heard it at rehearsal yesterday—I suppose Thelème took the *tempo* too slow!"

She sighed and asked:—

"What are you reading a night like this?" His expression became animated.

"A volume of Celtic poetry—I've found a stunning idea for music. What a tone-poem it will make! Here it is. What colour, what rhythms. It is called The Shadowy Horses. 'I hear the shadowy horses, their long manes a-shake'—"

"Who gave you the poem?"

"Oh, Rentgen, of course. Did you see him to-night?"

"You dear boy! You must be tired to death. Better rest. The critics will get you up early enough."

Through interminable hours the mind of Alixe revolved about a phrase she had picked up from Elvard Rentgen: "Music is a trap for weak souls; for the strong as the spinning of cobwebs. . . ."

VISIONARIES

II

It was pompous July and the Van Kuyps were still in Paris. They lived near Passy—from her windows high in the air Alixe caught the green at dawn as the sun lifted level rays. Richard was writing his new tone-poem, which the Société Harmonique accepted provisionally for the season following. Sordello had set the town agog because of the exhaustive articles by Rentgen it brought in its wake. He was a critic who wrote brilliantly of music in the terms of painting, of plastic arts in the technical phraseology of music, and by him the drama was discussed purely as literature. This deliberate and delicate confusion of æsthetics clouded the public mind. He described Sordello as a vast mural fresco, a Puvis de Chavannes in tone, a symphonic drama wherein agonized the shadowy Æschylean protagonist. Even sculpture was rifled for analogies, and Van Kuyp to his bewilderment found himself called "The Rodin of Music"; at other times, "Richard Strauss II," or a "Tonal Browning"; finally, he was adjured to swerve not from the path he had so wonderfully hewn for himself in the virgin jungle of modern art, and begged to resist the temptations of the music-drama.

Rentgen loathed the music of Wagner. Wagner had abused Meyerbeer for doing what he did himself — writing operas stuffed with spectacular effects. This man of the foot-

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

lights destroyed all musical imagination with his puppet shows, magic lanterns, Turkish bazaars, where, to the booming of mystic bells, the listener was drugged into opium-fed visions.

Under a tent, as at a fair, he assembled the mangled masterpieces of Bach, Gluck, Beethoven, Weber, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, and to a gullible public sold the songs of these music-lords — songs that should swim on high like great swan-clouds cleaving skies blue and inaccessible. And his music was operatic, after all, grand opera saccharine with commonplace melodies gorgeously attired — nothing more. Wagner, declared the indignant critic, was not original. He popularized the noble ideas of the masters, vulgarized and debased their dreams. He never conceived a single new melody, but substituted instead, sadly mauled and pinched thematic fragments of Liszt, Berlioz, and Beethoven, combined with exaggerated fairy-tales, clothed in showy tinsel and theatrical gauds, the illusion being aided by panoramic scenery; scenery that acted in company with toads, dragons, horses, snakes, crazy valkyrs, mermaids, half-mad humans, gods, demons, dwarfs, and giants. What else is all this but old-fashioned Italian opera with a new name? What else but an inartistic mixture of Scribe libretto and Northern mythology? Music-drama — fudge! Making music that one can *see* is a death-blow to a lofty idealization of the art.

Puzzled by the richness of Rentgen's vocabu-

VISIONARIES

lary, by his want of logic, Alixe asked herself many times whether she was wrong and her husband right. She wished to be loyal. His devotion to his work, his inspiration springing as it did from poetic sources, counted for something. Why not? All composers should read the poets. It is a starting-point. Modern music leans heavily on drama and fiction. Richard Strauss embroiders philosophical ideas, so why should not Richard Van Kuyp go to Ireland, to the one land where there is hope of a spiritual, a poetic renascence? Ireland! The very name evoked dreams!

When Rentgen called at the Van Kuyps' it was near the close of a warm afternoon. The composer would not stir, despite the invitation of the critic or the pleading of his wife. He knew that the angel wings of inspiration had been brushing his brow all the morning, and such visits were too rare to be flouted. He sat at his piano and in a composer's raucous varied voice, imitated the imaginary *timbres* of orchestral instruments. Sent forth, Mrs. Van Kuyp and Rentgen slowly walked into the little Parc of Auteuil, once the joy of the Goncourts.

"Musicians are as selfish as the sea," he asserted, as they sat upon a bench of tepid iron. She did not demur. The weather had exhausted her patience; she was young and fond of the open air — the woods made an irresistible picture this day. The critic watched her changing, dissatisfied face.

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

"Shall we ride?" he suddenly asked. Before she could shake a negative head, he quickly uttered the words that had been hovering in her mind for hours.

"Or, shall we go to the Bois?" She started. "What an idea! Go to the Bois without Richard, without my husband?"

"Why not?" he inquired, "it's not far away. Send him a wire asking him to join us; it will do him good after his labours. Come, Madame Van Kuy, come Alixe, my child." He paused. Her eyes expanded. "I'll go," she quietly announced — "that is, if you grant me a favour."

"A hundred!" he triumphantly cried.

III

To soothe her conscience, which began to ring faint alarm-bells at sundown, Alixe sent several despatches to her husband, and then tried a telephone; but she was not successful. Her mood shifted chilly, and they bored each other immeasurably on the long promenade vibrating with gypsy music and frivolous folk.

It was after seven o'clock as the sun slowly swam down the sky-line. Decidedly their little flight from the prison of stone was not offering rich recompense to Alixe Van Kuy and her elderly companion.

"And now for the favour!" he demanded, his eyes contentedly resting upon the graceful expanse of his guest's figure.

VISIONARIES

She moved restlessly: "My dear Rentgen, I am about to ask you a question, only a plain question. *That* is the favour." He bowed incredulously.

"I must know the truth about Richard. It is a serious matter, this composing of his. He neglects his pupils — most of them Americans who come to Paris to study with him. Yet with the reputation he has attained, due to you entirely" — she waved away an interruption — "he refuses to write songs or piano music that will sell. He is an incorrigible idealist and I confess I am discouraged. What can be our future?" She drew the deep breath of one in peril; this plain talk devoid of all sham mortified her exceedingly.

She was thankful that he did not attempt to play the rôle of fatherly adviser. His eyes were quite sincere when he answered her: —

"What you say, Alixe —" the familiarity brought with it no condescending reverberations — "has bothered me more than once. I shall be just as frank on my side. No, your husband has but little talent; original talent, none. He is mediocre — wait!" She started, her cheeks red with the blood that fled her heart when she heard this doleful news. "Wait! There are qualifications. In the first place, what do you expect from an American?"

"But you always write so glowingly of our composers," she interjected.

"And," he went on as if she had not spoken, "Van Kuyp is your typical countryman. He

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

has studied in Germany. He has muddled his brain with the music of a dozen different nations ; if he had had any individuality it would have been submerged. His memory has killed his imagination. He borrows his inspiration from the poets, from Liszt, Wagner, Berlioz, Richard Strauss. Anyhow, like all musicians of his country, he is too painfully self-conscious of his nationality."

" You, alone, are responsible for his present ambitions," retorted the unhappy woman.

- " Quite true, my dear friend. I acknowledge it."

" And you say this to my face ? "

" Do you wish me to lie ? " She did not reply. After a grim pause she burst forth :—

" Oh, why doesn't he compose an opera, and make a popular name ? "

" Richard Wagner Number II ! " There were implications of sarcasm in this which greatly displeased Mrs. Van Kuyp. They strolled on slowly. It was a melodious summer night ; mauve haze screened all but the exquisite large stars. Soothed despite rebellion, Alixe told herself sharply that in every duel with this man she was worsted. He said things that scratched her nerves ; yet she forgave. He had not the slightest attraction for her ; nevertheless, when he spoke, she listened, when he wrote, she read. He ruled the husband through his music ; he ruled her through her husband. And what did he expect ?

VISIONARIES

They retraced their way. A fantastic bridge spanning the brief marshland, frozen by the moonlight, appealed to them. They crossed. A coachman driving an open carriage hailed confidentially. Alixe entered and with a dexterous play of draperies usurped the back seat. Rentgen made no sign. He had her in full view, the moon streaking her disturbed features with its unflattering pencil.

They started bravely, the horses running for home; but the rapid gait soon subsided into a rhythmic trot. Rentgen spoke. She hardly recognized his voice, so gently monotonous were his phrases.

"Dear Alixe. It is a night for confessions. You care for your husband, you are wrapped up in his art work, you are solicitous of his future, of his fame. It is admirable. You are a model wife for an artist. But tell me frankly, doesn't it bore you to death? Doesn't all this talk of music, themes, orchestration, of the public, critics, musicians, conductors, get on your nerves? Is it any consolation for you to know that Van Kuyp will be famous? What is his fame or his failure to you? Where do you, Alixe Van Kuyp, come in? Why must your charming woman's soul be sacrificed, warped to this stunted tree of another's talent? You are silent. You say he is trying to make me deny Richard! You were never more mistaken. I am interested in you both; interested in you as a noble woman — stop! I mean it. And in-

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

terested in Richard — well — because he is my own creation. . . .”

She watched him now with her heart in her eyes ; he frightened her more with these low, purring words, than if he declared open love.

“ He is my own handiwork. I have created him. I have fashioned his outlines, have wound up the mechanism that moves him to compose. Did you ever read that terrifying thought of Yeats, the Irish poet ? I’ve forgotten the story, but remember the idea : ‘The beautiful arts were sent into the world to overthrow nations, and, finally, life itself, sowing everywhere unlimited desires, like torches thrown into a burning city.’ There — ‘like torches thrown into a burning city !’ Richard Van Kuyp is one of my burning torches. In the spectacle of his impuissance I find relief from my own suffering.”

The booming of the Tzigane band was no longer heard — only the horses’ muffled footfalls and the intermittent chromatic drone of hidden distant tram-cars. She shivered and shaded her face with her fan. There was something remote from humanity in his speech. He continued with increasing vivacity : —

“ Music is a burning torch. And music, like ideas, can slay the brain. Wagner borrowed his harmonic fire from the torch of Chopin — ” She broke in : —

“ Don’t talk of Chopin ! Tell me more of Van Kuyp. Why do you call him *yours* ? ”

VISIONARIES

Her curiosity was become pain. It mastered her prudence.

"In far-away Celtic legends there may be found a lovely belief that our thoughts are independent realities, that they go about in the void seeking creatures to control. They are as bodiless souls. When they descend into a human being they possess his moods, in very existence — "

"And Richard!" she muttered. His words swayed her like strange music; the country through which they were passing was a blank; she could see but two luminous points—the nocturnal eyes of Elvard Rentgen, as he spun his cobwebs in the moonshine. She did not fear him; nothing could frighten her now. One desire held her. If it were unslaked, she felt she would collapse. It was to know the truth, to be told everything! He put restraining fingers on her ungloved hand; they seemed like cold, fat spiders. Yet she was only curious, with a curiosity that murdered the spirit within her.

"To transfuse these shadows, my dear Alixe, has been one of my delights, for I can project my futile desires into another's soul. I am denied the gift of music-making, so this is my revenge on nature for bungling its job. If Richard had genius, my intervention would be superfluous. He has none. He is dull. You must realize it. But since he has known me, has felt my influence, has been subject to my

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

volition, my sorcery, you may call it,—” his laugh was disagreeably conscious,—“ he has developed the shadow of a great man. He will seem a great composer. I shall make him think he is one. I shall make the world believe it, also. It is my fashion of squaring a life I hate. But if I chose to withdraw —”

The road they entered was black and full of the buzzing shadows of hot night, but she was oblivious to everything but his hallucinating voice :—

“ And if you withdraw ? ” Her mouth echoed phrases without the complicity of her brain.

“ If I do — ah, these cobweb spinners ! Good-by to Richard Van Kuyp and dreams of glory.” This note of harsh triumph snapped his weaving words.

“ I don’t believe you or your boasts,” remarked Alixe, in her most conventionally amused manner. “ You are trying to scare me, and with this hypnotic joke about Richard you have only hypnotized yourself. I mean to tell Mr. Van Kuyp every bit of our conversation. I’m not frightened by your vampire tales. You critics are only shadows of composers.”

“ Yes, but we make ordinary composers believe they are great,” he replied acridly.

“ I’ll tell this to Richard.”

“ He won’t believe you.”

“ He shall — he won’t believe *you* ! Oh, Rentgen, how can you invent such cruel things ? Are you always so malicious ? What do you

VISIONARIES

mean? Come—what do you expect?" She closed her eyes, anticipating an avowal. Why should a man seek to destroy her faith in her husband, in love itself, if not for some selfish purpose of his own? But she was wrong, and became vaguely alarmed—at least if he had offered his service and sympathy in exchange for her friendship, she might have understood his fantastic talk. Rentgen sourly reflected—despite epigrams, women never vary. For him her sentiment was suburban. It strangled poetry. But he said nothing, though she imagined he looked depressed; nor did he open his mouth as the carriage traversed avenues of processional poplars before arriving at her door. She turned to him imploringly:—

"You must come with me. I shall never be able to go in alone, without an excuse. Don't—don't repeat to Richard what you said to me, in joke, I am sure, about his music. Heavens! What will my husband think?" There was despair in her voice, but hopefulness in her gait and gesture, when they reached the ill-lighted hall.

A night-lamp stood on the composer's study table. The piano was open. He sat at the keyboard, though not playing, as they hurriedly entered the room.

"You poor fellow! You look worn out. Did you think we had run away from you? Did you get the wires, the telephone messages? Oh, why did you keep us expecting you, Richard! We

A MASTER OF COBWEBS

have had a wonderful time and missed you so much! Such a talk with Rentgen! And all about *you*. *Nicht wahr*, Rentgen? He says you are the only man in the world with a musical future. Isn't that so, Rentgen? Didn't you say that Richard was the only man in whom you took any interest? Say what you said to me! I *dare* you!"

The musician, aroused by this wordy assault, looked from one to the other with his heavy eyes, the eyes of an owl rudely disturbed. Alixe almost danced her excitement. She hummed shrilly and grasped Van Kuyp's arm in the gayest rebounding humour.

"Why don't you speak, Maestro?"

"I didn't join you because I was too busy at my score. Listen, children! I have sketched the beginning of *The Shadowy Horses*. You remember the Yeats poem, Rentgen? Listen!"

Furiously he attacked the instrument, from which escaped accents of veritable torture; a delirium of tone followed, meagre melodies fighting for existence in the boiling madness of it all; it was the parody of a parody, the music of yesterday masquerading as the music of to-morrow. Alixe nervously watched the critic. He stood at the end of the piano and morosely fumbled his beard. Again a wave of anxious hatred, followed by forebodings, crowded her alert brain. She desperately clutched her husband's shoulder; he finished in a burst of sheer pounding and brutal roaring. Then she threw her arms about

VISIONARIES

him in an ecstasy of pride — her confidence was her only anchorage.

“There, Elvard Rentgen! What did you tell me? I dare you to say that this music is not marvellous, not original!” Her victorious gaze, in which floated indomitable faith, challenged him, as she drew the head of her husband to her protecting bosom. The warring of exasperated eyes endured a moment; to Alixe it seemed eternity. Rentgen bowed and went away from this castle of cobwebs, deeply stirred by the wife’s tender untruths. . . . She was the last dawn illuminating his empty, sordid life, — now a burnt city of defaced dreams and blackened torches.

II

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. — *Genesis*.

I

THE SERMON

“AND the Seven Deadly Sins, beloved brethren, are: Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, Sloth. To these our wise Mother, the Church, opposes the contrary virtues: Humility, Chastity, Meekness, Temperance, Brotherly Love, Diligence.” The voice of the preacher was clear and well modulated. It penetrated to the remotest corner of the church. Baldur, sitting near the pulpit, with its elaborate traceries of marble, idly wondered why the sins were, with few exceptions, words of one syllable, while those of the virtues were all longer. Perhaps because it was easier to sin than to repent! The voice of the speaker deepened as he continued: —

“Now the Seven Deadly Arts are: Music, Literature, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Dancing, Acting. The mercy of God has luckily purified these once pagan inventions, and trans-

VISIONARIES

formed them into saving instruments of grace. Yet it behooves us to examine with the utmost diligence the possible sources of evil latent in each and every one of those arts. Then we shall consider some of the special forms of sin that may develop from them. St. Chrysostom warned the faithful against the danger of the Eighth Deadly Art—Perfume. . . .”

His phrases, which began to fall into the rhythmic drone of a Sunday sermon, lulled Baldur to dreaming. Perfume—that delicious vocable! And the contrast with what his own nostrils reported to his consciousness made him slightly shiver. It was on a Friday night in Lent that, weary in flesh and spirit, his conscience out of tune, he had entered the church and taken the first vacant seat. Without, the air was sluggish; after leaving his club the idea of theatres or calls had set his teeth on edge. He longed to be alone, to weigh in the silence of his heart the utter futility of life. Religion had never been a part of his training as the only son of a millionaire, and if he preferred the Roman Catholic ritual above all others, it was because the appeal was to his æsthetic sense; a Turkish mosque, he assured his friends, produced the same soothing impression—gauze veils gently waving and slowly obscuring the dulling realities of everyday existence. This *morbidezza* of the spirit the Mahometans call *Kef*; the Christians, pious ecstasy.

But now he could not plunge himself, despite

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

the faint odour of incense lingering in the atmosphere, into the deepest pit of his personality. At first he ascribed his restlessness to the sultry weather, then to his abuse of tea and cigarettes, — perhaps it was the sharp odour of the average congregation, that collective odour of humanity encountered in church, theatre, or court-rooms. The smell of poverty was mingled with the heavy scents of fashionable women, who, in the minority, made their presence felt by their showy gowns, rustling movements, and attitudes of superior boredom. In a vast building like this extremes touch with eagerness on the part of the poor, to whom these furtive views of the rich and indolent brought with them a bitter consolation.

Baldur remarked these things as he leaned back in his hard seat and barely listened to the sermon, which poured forth as though the tap would never be turned off again. And then a delicate note of iris, most episcopal of perfumes, emerged from the mass of odours — musk, garlic, damp shoes, alcohol, shabby clothing, rubber, pomade, cologne, rice-powder, tobacco, patchouli, sachet, and a hundred other tintings of the earthly symphony. The finely specialized olfactory sense of the young man told him that it was either a bishop or a beautiful woman who imparted to the air the subtle, penetrating aroma of iris. But it was neither ecclesiastic nor maid. At his side was a short, rather thick-set woman of vague age; she might have been twenty-five

VISIONARIES

or forty. Her hair was cut in masculine fashion, her attire unattractive. As clearly as he could distinguish her features he saw that she was not good-looking. A stern mask it was, though not hardened. He would not have looked at such an ordinary physiognomy twice if the iris had not signalled his peculiar sense. There was no doubt that to her it was due. Susceptible as he was to odours, Baldur was not a ladies' man. He went into society because it was his world; and he attended in a perfunctory manner to the enormous estate left him by his father, bound up in a single trust company. But his thoughts were always three thousand miles away, in that delectable city of cities, Paris. For Paris he suffered a painful nostalgia. There he met his true brethren, while in New York he felt an alien. He was one. The city, with its high, narrow streets — granite tunnels; its rude reverberations; its colourless, toiling barbarians, with their undistinguished physiognomies, their uncouth indifference to art,—he did not deny that he loathed this nation, vibrating only in the presence of money, sports, grimy ward politics, while exhibiting a depressing snobbery to things British. There was no *nuance* in its life or its literature, he asserted. France was his *patrie psychique*; he would return there some day and forever. . . .

The iris crept under his nostrils, and again he regarded the woman. This time she faced him, and he no longer wondered, for he saw her eyes.

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

With such eyes only a great soul could be imprisoned in her brain. They were smoke-gray, with long, dark lashes, and they did not seem to focus perfectly — at least there was enough deflection to make their expression odd, withal interesting, like the slow droop of Eleonora Duse's magic eye. Though her features were rigid, the woman's glance spoke to Baldur, spoke eloquently. Her eyes were — or was it the iris? — symbols of a soul-state, of a rare emotion, not of sex, nor yet sexless. The pupils seemed powdered with a strange iridescence. He became more troubled than before. What did the curious creature want of him! She was neither coquette nor cocotte, flirtation was not hinted by her intense expression. He resumed his former position, but her eyes made his shoulders burn, as if they had sufficient power to bore through them. He no longer paid any attention to his surroundings. The sermon was like the sound of far-away falling waters, the worshippers were so many black marks. Of two things was he aware — the odour of iris and her eyes.

He knew that he was in an overwrought mood. For some weeks this mood had been descending upon his spirit, like a pall. He had avoided music, pictures, the opera — which he never regarded as an art; even his favourite poets he could not read. Nor did he degustate, as was his daily wont, the supreme prose of the French masters. The pleasures of robust stomachs, gourmandizing and drinking, were de-

VISIONARIES

nied him by nature. He could not sip a glass of wine, and for meat he entertained distaste. His physique proved him to be of the neurotic temperament—he was very tall, very slim, of an exceeding elegance, in dress a finical dandy; while his trim pointed blue-black beard and dark, foreign eyes were the cause of his being mistaken often for a Frenchman or a Spaniard—which illusion was not dissipated when he chose to speak their several tongues.

Involuntarily, and to the ire of his neighbours, he arose and indolently made his way down the side aisle. When he reached the baize swinging doors, he saw the woman approaching him. As if she had been an acquaintance of years, she saluted him carelessly, and, accompanied by the scandalized looks of many in the congregation, the pair left the church, though not before the preacher had sonorously quoted from the Psalm, *Domine ne in Furore*, “For my loins are filled with illusions; and there is no health in my flesh.”

II

THE SÉANCE

Je cherche des parfums nouveaux, des fleurs plus larges, des plaisirs inéprouvés. — FLAUBERT.

“It may be all a magnificent illusion, but—” he began.

“Everything is an illusion in this life, though seldom magnificent,” she answered. They slowly

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

walked up the avenue. The night was tepid ; motor cars, looking like magnified beetles, with bulging eyes of fire, went swiftly by. The pavements were almost deserted when they reached the park. He felt as if hypnotized, and once, rather meanly, was glad that no one saw him in company of his dowdy companion.

"I wonder if you realize that we do not know each other's name," he said.

"Oh, yes. You are Mr. Baldur. My name is Mrs. Lilith Whistler."

"Mrs. Whistler. Not the medium?"

"The medium—as you call it. In reality I am only a woman, happy, or unhappy, in the possession of super-normal powers."

"Not supernatural, then?" he interposed. He was a sceptic who called himself agnostic. The mystery of earth and heaven might be interpreted, but always in terms of science ; yet he did not fancy the superior manner in which this charlatan flouted the supernatural. He had heard of her miracles—and doubted them. She gave a little laugh at his correction.

"What phrase-jugglers you men are! You want all the splendours of the Infinite thrown in with the price of admission ! I said super-normal, because we know of nothing greater than nature. Things that are off the beaten track of the normal, across the frontiers, some call supernatural ; but it is their ignorance of the vast, unexplored territory of the spirit—which is only the material masquerading in a different guise."

VISIONARIES

"But you go to church, to a Lenten service —?" It was as if he had known her for years, and their unconventional behaviour never crossed his mind. He did not even ask himself where they were moving.

"I go to church to rest my nerves — as do many other people," she replied; "I was interested in the parallel of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Deadly Arts."

"You believe the arts are sinful?" He was curious.

"I don't believe in sin at all. A bad conscience is the result of poor digestion. Sins are created so that we pay the poll-tax to eternity — pay it on this side of the ferry. Yet the arts may become dangerous engines of destruction if wrongfully employed. The Fathers of the early Church, Ambrose and the rest, were right in viewing them suspiciously." — He spoke:—

"The arts diabolic! Then what of the particular form of wizardry practised so successfully by the celebrated Mrs. Whistler, one of whose names is, according to the Talmud, that of Adam's first wife?"

"What do you know, my dear young man, of diabolic arts?"

"Only that I am walking with you near the park on a dark night of April and I never saw you before a half-hour ago. Isn't that magic — white, not black?"

"Pray do not mock magic, either white or black. Remember the fate of the serpents

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

manufactured by Pharaoh's magicians. They were, need I tell you, speedily devoured by the serpents of Moses and Aaron. Both parties did not play fair in the game. If it was black magic to transform a rod into a snake on the part of Pharaoh's conjurers, was it any less reprehensible for the Hebrew magicians to play the same trick? It was prestidigitation for all concerned —only the side of the children of Israel was espoused in the recital. Therefore, do not talk of black or white magic. There is only one true magic. And it is not slate-writing, toe-joint snapping, fortune-telling, or the vending of charms. Magic, too, is an art—like other arts. This is forgotten by the majority of its practitioners. Hence the sordid vulgarity of the average mind-reader and humbugging spiritualist of the dark-chamber séance. Besides, the study of the super-normal mind tells us of the mind in health — nature is shy in revealing her secrets."

They passed the lake and were turning toward the east driveway. Suddenly she stopped and under the faint starlight regarded her companion earnestly. He had not been without adventures in his career—Paris always provided them in plenty; but this encounter with a homely woman piqued him. Her eye he felt was upon him and her voice soothing.

"Mr. Baldur—listen! Since Milton wrote his great poem the English-speaking people are all devil-worshippers, for Satan is the hero of Paradise Lost. But I am no table-tipping me-

VISIONARIES

dium eager for your applause or your money. I don't care for money. I think you know enough of me through the newspapers to vouchsafe that. You are rich, and it is your chief misery. Listen! Whether you believe it or not, you are very unhappy. Let me read your horoscope. Your club life bores you; you are tired of our silly theatres; no longer do you care for Wagner's music. You are deracinated; you are unpatriotic. For that there is no excuse. The arts are for you deadly. I am sure you are a lover of literature. Yet what a curse it has been for you! When you see one of your friends drinking wine, you call him a fool because he is poisoning himself. But you—you poison your spirit with the honey of France, of Scandinavia, of Russia. As for the society of women—”

“The Eternal Womanly!” he sneered.

“The Eternal Simpleton, you mean. In *that* swamp of pettiness, idiocy, and materialism, a man of your nature could not long abide. Religion—it has not yet responded to your need. And without faith your sins lose their savour. The arts—you don't know them all, the Seven Deadly Arts and the One Beautiful Art!” She paused. Her voice had been as the sound of delicate flutes. He was afame.

“Is there, then, an eighth art?” he quickly asked.

“Would you know it if you saw it?”

“Of course. Where is it, what is it?”

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

She laughed and took his arm.

"Why did you look at me in church?"

"Because — it was mere chance — no, it may have been the odour of iris. I am mad over perfume. I think it a neglected art, degraded to the function of anointment. I have often dreamed of an art by which a dazzling and novel synthesis of fragrant perfumes would be invented by some genius, some latter-day Rimmel or Lubin whom we could hail as a peer of Chopin or Richard Strauss — two composers who have expressed perfume in tone. Roinard in his *Cantiques des Cantiques* attempted a concordance of tone, light, and odours. Yes — it was the iris that attracted me."

"But I have no iris about me. I have none now," she simply replied. He faced her.

"No iris? What — ?"

"I *thought* iris," she added triumphantly, as she guided him into one of the side streets off Madison Avenue. He was astounded. She must be a hypnotist, he said to himself. No suggestion of iris clung to her now. And he remembered that the odour disappeared after they left the church. He held his peace until they arrived before a brown-stone house of the ordinary kind with an English basement. She took a key from her pocket and, going down several steps, beckoned to him. Baldur followed. His interest in this modern Cassandra and her bizarre words was too great for him to hesitate or to realize that he would get himself into some dangerous

VISIONARIES

scrape. And was this truly the Mrs. Whistler whose tricks of telepathy and other extraordinary antics had puzzled and angered the wise men of two continents? He did not have much time for reflection. A grilled door opened, and presently he was in a room furnished very much like a physician's office. Electric bulbs, an open grate, and two bookcases gave the apartment a familiar, cheerful appearance. Baldur sat down on a low chair, and Mrs. Whistler removed her commonplace headgear. In the bright light she was younger than he had imagined, and her head a beautifully modelled one — broad brows, very full at the back, and the mask that of an emotional actress. Her smoke-coloured eyes were most remarkable and her helmet of hair blue black.

"And now that you are my guest at last, Mr. Baldur, let me apologize for the exercise of my art upon your responsive nerves ;" she made this witch-burning admission as if she were accounting for the absence of tea. To his relief she offered him nothing. He had a cigarette between his fingers, but he did not care to smoke. She continued :—

"For some time I have known you — never mind how! For some time I have wished to meet you. I am not an impostor, nor do I desire to pose as the goddess of a new creed. But you, Irving Baldur, are a man among men who will appreciate what I may show you. You love, you understand, perfumes. You have even

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

wished for a new art — don't forget that there are others in the world to whom the seven arts have become a thrice-told tale, to whom the arts have become too useful. All great art should be useless. Yet architecture houses us; sculpture flatters us; painting imitates us; dancing is pure vanity; literature and the drama, mere vehicles for bread-earning; while music — music, the most useless art as it should have been — is in the hands of the speculators. Moreover music is too sexual — it reports in a more intense style the stories of our loves. Music is the memory of love. What Prophet will enter the temple of the modern arts and drive away with his divine scourge the vile money-changers who fatten therein?" Her voice was shrill as she paced the room. A very sibyl this, her crest of hair agitated, her eyes sparkling with wrath. He missed the Cumæan tripod.

"There is an art, Baldur, an art that was one of the lost arts of Babylon until now, one based, as are all the arts, on the senses. Perfume — the poor, neglected nose must have its revenge. It has outlived the other senses in the æsthetic field."

"What of the palate — you have forgotten that. Cookery, too, is a fine art," he ventured. His smile irritated her.

"Yes, Frenchmen have invented symphonic sauces, they say. But again, eating is a useful art; primarily it serves to nourish the body. When man was wholly wild — he is a mere bar-

VISIONARIES

barian to-day — his sense of smell guarded him from his foes, from the beasts, from a thousand dangers. Civilization, with its charming odours of decay, — have you ever ventured to savour New York? — cast into abeyance the keenest of all the senses. Little wonder, then, that there was no art of perfume like the arts of vision and sound. I firmly believe the Hindoos, Egyptians, and the Chinese knew of such an art. How account for the power of theocracies? How else credit the tales of the saints who scattered perfumes — St. Francis de Paul, St. Joseph of Cupertino, Venturini of Bergamo?"

"But," he interrupted, "all this is interesting, fascinating. What I wish to know is what form your art may take. How marshal odours as melodies in a symphony, as colours on a canvas?" She made an impatient gesture.

"And how like an amateur you talk. Melody! When harmony is infinitely greater in music! Form! When colour is infinitely greater than line! The most profound music gives only the timbre — melodies are for infantile people without imagination, who believe in patterns. Tone is the quality *I* wish on a canvas, not anxious drawing. So it is with perfumes. I can blend them into groups of lovely harmony; I can give you single notes of delicious timbre — in a word, I can evoke an odour symphony which will transport you. Memory is a supreme factor in this art. Do not forget how the vaguest scent will carry you back to your youthful dreamland.

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

It is also the secret of spiritual correspondences — it plays the great rôle of bridging space between human beings."

"I sniff the air promise-crammed," he gayly misquoted. "But when will you rewrite this Apocalypse? and how am I to know whether I shall really enjoy this feast of perfume, if you can simulate the odour of iris as you did an hour ago?"

"I propose to show you an artificial paradise," she firmly asserted. In the middle of the room there was a round table, the top inlaid with agate. On it a large blue bowl stood, and it was empty. Mrs. Whistler went to a swinging cabinet and took from it a dozen small phials. "Now for the incantation," he jokingly said. In her matter-of-fact manner she placed the bottles on the table, and uncorking them, she poured them slowly into the bowl. He broke the silence :—

"Isn't there any special form of hair-raising invocation that goes with this dangerous operation?"

"Listen to this." Her eyes swimming with fire, she intoned :—

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert: Lo you there,
That hillock burning with a brazen glare;
Those myriad dusky flames with points aglow
Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro;
A Sabbath of the serpents, heaped pell-mell
For Devil's roll-call and some fête in Hell:
Yet I strode on austere;
No hope could have no fear.

VISIONARIES

He did not seem to hear. From out the bowl there was stealing a perfume which overmastered his will and led him captive to the lugubrious glade of the Druids. . . .

III

THE CIRCUS OF CANDLES

Comme d'autres esprits voguent sur la musique,
Le mien, ô mon amour ! nage sur ton parfum.

— BAUDELAIRE.

He was not dreaming, for he saw the woman at the bowl, saw her apartment. But the interior of his brain was as melancholy as a lighted cathedral. A mortal sadness encompassed him, and his nerves were like taut violin strings. It was within the walls of his skull, that he saw—his mundane surroundings did not disturb his visions. And the waves of dolour swept over his consciousness. A mingling of tuberoses, narcissus, attar of roses, and ambergris he detected in the air—as *triste* as a morbid nocturne of Chopin. This was followed by a blending of heliotrope, moss-rose, and hyacinth, together with dainty touches of geranium. He dreamed of Beethoven's manly music when whiffs of apple-blossom, white rose, cedar, and balsam reached him. Mozart passed roguishly by in strains of scarlet pimpernel, mignonette, syringa, and violets. Then the sky was darkened with Schumann's perverse harmonies as jasmine, laven-

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

der, and lime were sprayed over him. Music, surely, was the art nearest akin to odour. A superb and subtle chord floated about him; it was composed of vervain, opopanax, and frangipane. He could not conceive of a more unearthly triad. It was music from Parsifal. Through the mists that were gathering he savoured a fulminating bouquet of patchouli, musk, bergamot, and he recalled the music of Mascagni. Brahms strode stolidly on in company with new-mown hay, cologne, and sweet peas. Liszt was interpreted as ylang-ylang, myrrh, and maréchale; Richard Strauss, by wistaria, oil of cloves, chypre, poppy, and crab-apple.

Suddenly there developed a terrific orchestration of chromatic odours: ambrosia, cassia, orange, peach-blossoms, and musk of Tonkin, magnolia, eglantine, hortensia, lilac, saffron, begonia, peau d'Espagne, acacia, carnation, liban, fleur de Takeoka, cypress, oil of almonds, benzoin, jacinth, rue, shrub, olea, clematis, the hediosma of Jamaica, olive, vanilla, cinnamon, petunia, lotus, frankincense, sorrel, neroli from Japan, jonquil, verbena, spikenard, thyme, hyssop, and decaying orchids. This quintessential medley was as the sonorous blasts of Berlioz, repugnant and exquisite; it swayed the soul of Baldur as the wind sways the flame. There were odours like wingèd dreams; odours as the plucked sounds of celestial harps; odours mystic and evil, corrupt and opulent; odours recalling the sweet, dense smell of chloro-

VISIONARIES

form ; odours evil, angelic, and anonymous. They painted — painted by Satan ! — upon his cerebellum more than music — music that merged into picture ; and he was again in the glade of the Druids. The huge scent-symphony dissolved in a shower of black roses which covered the ground ankle-deep. An antique temple of exotic architecture had thrown open its bronze doors, and out there surged and rustled a throng of Bacchanalian beings who sported and shouted around a terminal god, which, with smiling, ironic lips, accepted their delirious homage. White nymphs and brown displayed in choric rhythms the dance of the Seven Deadly Sins, and their goat-hoofed mates gave vertiginous pursuit. At first the pagan gayety of the scene fired the fancy of the solitary spectator ; but soon his nerves, disordered by the rout and fatigued by the spoor of so many odours, warned him that something disquieting was at hand. He felt a nameless horror as the sinister bitter odour of honeysuckle, sandalwood, and aloes echoed from the sacred grove. A score of seductive young witches pranced in upon their broomsticks, and without dismounting surrounded the garden god. A battalion of centaurs charged upon them. The vespertine hour was nigh, and over this iron landscape there floated the moon, an opal button in the sky. Then to his shame and fear he saw that the Satyr had vanished and in its place there reared the Black Venus, the vile shape of ancient

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

Africa, and her face was the face of Lilith. The screaming lovely witches capered in fantastic spirals, each sporting a lighted candle. It was the diabolic Circus of the Candles, the infernal circus of the Witches' Sabbath. Rooted to the ground, Baldur realized with fresh amazement and vivid pain the fair beauty of Adam's prehistoric wife, her luxurious blond hair, her shapely shoulders, her stature of a goddess—he trembled, for she had turned her mordant gaze in his direction. And he strove in vain to bring back the comforting vision of the chamber. She smiled, and the odours of sandal, coreopsis, and aloes encircled his soul like the plaited strands of her glorious hair. She was that other Lilith, the only offspring of the old Serpent. On what storied fresco, limned by what worshipper of Satan, had these accursed lineaments, this lithe, seductive figure, been shown! Names of Satanic painters, from Hell-fire Breughel to Arnold Böcklin, from Felicien Rops to Franz Stuck, passed through the halls of Irving Baldur's memory.

The clangour of the feast was become mad-dening. He heard the Venus ballet music from Tannhäuser entwined with the acridities of aloes, sandal, and honeysuckle. Then the aroma of pitch, sulphur, and assafetida cruelly strangled the other melodic emanations. Lilith, disdaining the shelter of her nymphs and their clowneries, stood forth in all the hideous majesty of *Ænothea*, the undulating priestess of the

VISIONARIES

Abominable Shape. His nerves macerated by this sinful apparition, Baldur struggled to resist her mute command. What was it? He saw her wish streaming from her eyes. Despair! Despair! Despair! There is no hope for thee, wretched earthworm! No abode but the abysmal House of Satan! Despair, and you will be welcomed! By a violent act of volition, set in motion by his fingers fumbling a small gold cross he wore as a watch-guard, the heady fumes of the orgy dissipated. . . .

He was sitting facing the bowl, and over it with her calm, confidential gaze was the figure of Lilith Whistler.

"Have I proved to you that perfume is the art of arts?" she demanded. He rushed from the room and was shaking the grilled gate in the hallway like a caged maniac, when with a pitying smile she released him. He reached the street at a bound. . . .

. . . "the evil of perfume, I repeat, was one against which the venerable Fathers of the Church warned the faithful." The preacher's voice had sagged to a monotone. Baldur lifted his eyes in dismay. Near him sat the same woman, and she still stared at him as if to rebuke him for his abstraction. About her hovered the odour of iris. Had it been only a disturbing dream? Intoxicated by his escape from damnation, from the last of the Deadly Arts, he bowed his head in grateful prayer. What ec-

THE EIGHTH DEADLY SIN

stazy to be once more in the arms of Mother Church! There, dipped in her lustral waters, and there alone would he find solace for his barren heart, pardon for his insane pride of intellect, and protection from the demons that waylaid his sluggish soul. The sermon ended as it began:—

“And the Seven Deadly Sins, beloved brethren, are: Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Anger Gluttony, Envy, Sloth. *Oremus!*”

“Amen,” fervently responded Baldur the Immoralist.

III

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

Lo, this is that Aholibah
Whose name was blown among strange seas. . . .
— SWINBURNE.

I

THE AVIARY

WHEN the last breakfast guests had gone the waiters of the café began their most disagreeable daily task. All the silver was assembled on one of the long tables in an inner room, where, as at a solemn conclave, the servants took their seats, and, presided over by the major-domo of the establishment, they polished the knives and forks, spoons, and sugar-tongs, filled the salt-cellars, replenished the pepper-boxes and other paraphernalia of the dining art. The gabble in this close apartment was terrific. Joseph, the maître d'hôtel, rapped in vain a dozen times for silence. The chef poked his head of a truculent Gascon through the door and indulged in a war of wit with a long fellow from Marseilles,—called the “mast” because he was very tall and thin, and had cooked in the galley of a Mediterranean trading brig. From time to time one of

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

the piccolos, a fat little boy from the South, carried in pitchers of flat beer, brewed in the suburbs. As it was a hot day, he was kept busy. The waiters had gone through a trying morning; there were many strangers in Paris. Outside, the Boulevard des Italiens, despite its shade trees, broiled under a torrid July sun that swam in a mercilessly blue sky.

The majority of the men were listening to gossip about their colleagues in the Café Cardinal across the way. Ambroise alone sat apart and patted and smoothed the salt in its receptacles. He was a young man from some little town in Alsace, a furious patriot, and the butt of his companions—for he was the latest comer in the Café Riche. Though he told his family name, Nettier, and declared that his father and mother were of French blood, he was called “the German.” He was good-looking, very blond, with big, innocent blue eyes; and while he was never molested personally,—a short, sharp tussle with a cook had proved him to be a man of muscle,—behind his back his walk was mimicked, his precise attitudes were openly bantered. But Ambroise stood this torture gantlet equably. He had lived long enough among Germans to copy their impassive manner and, coupled with a natural contempt for his fellow-monkeys in the cage, he knew that perhaps in a day a new man would receive all these unwelcome attentions. Moreover, his work, clear-cut, unobtrusive, and capable, pleased

VISIONARIES

M. Joseph. And when the patron himself dined at the café, Ambroise was the garçon selected to wait upon him. Hence the jealousy of his colleagues. Couple to this the fact that he was reported miserly, and had saved a large sum—which were all sufficient reasons for his unpopularity.

As the afternoon wore on little airs began to play in the tree-tops; the street watering carts had been assiduous, and before the terrace water had been sprinkled by the piccolos so effectively that at five o'clock, when the jaded stock-brokers, journalists, and business men began to flock in, each for his apéritif, the café was comparatively cool.

A few women's frocks relieved the picture with discreet or joyous shades of white and pink. Ambroise was diligent and served his regular customers, the men who grumbled if any one occupied their favourite corners. Absinthe nicely iced, dominoes, the evening papers—these he brought as he welcomed familiar faces. But his thoughts were not his own, and his pose when not in service was listless, even bored. Would *she* return that evening with the same crowd—was the idea that had taken possession of his brain. He was very timid in the presence of women, and it diverted the waiters to see him blush when he waited upon the gorgeous birds that thronged the aviary at night, making its walls echo with their chattering, quarrels, laughter. This provincial, modest, sensitive, the

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

only child of old-fashioned parents, was stupefied and shocked in the presence of the over-decorated and under-dressed creatures, daubed like idols, who began to flock in the café, with or without escorts, after eleven o'clock every night in the year. He knew them all by name. He knew their histories. He could detect at a glance whether they were unhappy or merely depressed by the rain, whether they drank champagne from happiness or desperation. Notwithstanding his dreamy disposition his temperament was ardent; he was an unspoiled soul; he felt himself a sort of moral barometer for the magnificent and feline women who treated him as if he were a wooden post when they were gossiping, harried him like an animal when they were thirsty. He noted that they were always thirsty. They smoked more than they ate, and whispered more, if no men were present, than they smoked. But then, men were seldom absent.

The night previous, Ambroise recalled the fact, she had not come in with a different set. This was not her custom, and he worried over it. Protected by princes and financiers, she nevertheless loved her liberty so much that one seldom caught her in the same company twice in succession. For this singular caprice Aholibah, oftener called the Woman from Morocco,—because she had lived in Algiers,—was the despair of her circle. Why, argued the other birds, why fly in the face of luck? To be sure, she was still young, still beautiful, with

VISIONARIES

that sort of metallic beauty which reminded Ambroise of some priceless bronze blackened in the sun. She was meagre, diabolically graceful, dark, with huge saucer-like eyes that greedily drank in her surroundings. But her lashes were long, and she could veil her glance so that her brilliant face looked as if the shutters had been closed on her soul. Across her brows a bar of blue-black marked the passage of her eyebrows—which sable line was matched by her abundant hair, worn in overshadowing clusters. She dressed winter and summer in scarlet, and her stage name was Aholibah—bestowed upon her by some fantastic poet who had not read Ezekiel, but Swinburne. It was rumoured by her intimates that her real name was Clotilde Durval, that her mother had been a seamstress. . . .

With a sinking at the heart Ambroise saw her enter in the company of the same gentleman she had brought the previous evening. The garçon did not analyze this strange, jealous feeling, for he was too busily employed in seating his guests and relieving the man of his hat and walking-stick. An insolent chap it was, with his air of an assured conqueror and the easy bearing of wealth. There was little discussion as to the order—a certain brand of wine, iced beyond recognition for any normal palate, was always served to Aholibah. She loved “needles on her tongue,” she asseverated if any one offered her weaker stuff. That July

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

night she looked like a piratical craft that had captured a sleek merchantman for prize. She was all smoothness; Ambroise alone detected the retracted claws of the leopardess. She blazed in the electric illumination, and her large hat, with its swelling plumes, threw her dusky features into shadow — her eyes seemed far away under its brim and glowed with unholy phosphorescence.

While he arranged the details of the silver wine-pail in the other room, the chef asked him if the Princess Comet had arrived. Ambroise almost snarled — much to the astonishment of the Gascon. And when the sommelier attempted to help him with the wine, he was elbowed vigorously. Ambroise must have been drinking too much, said the boys; Joseph rather curiously inspected his waiter as he made his accustomed round in the café. But, pale as usual, Ambroise stood near his table, his whole bearing an intent and thoroughly professional one. Joseph was satisfied and drove the chef back to the kitchen.

The young Alsatian had never seen Aholibah look so radiant. She was in high spirits, and her pungent talk aroused her companion from incipient moroseness. After midnight the party grew — some actresses from a near-by theatre came in with their male friends, and another waiter was detailed to the aid of Ambroise. But he stuck to the first-comers and served so much wine to them that he had the

VISIONARIES

satisfaction of seeing Aholibah's disagreeable protector collapse. She hardly noticed it, for she was talking vivaciously to Madeleine about the première of Donnay's comedy. Thrice Ambroise sought to fill her glass; but she repulsed him. He was sad. Something told him that Aholibah was farther away from him than ever; was she on the eve of forming one of those alliances that would rob him finally of her presence? He eyed the sleeping man — surely a monster, a millionaire, with the tastes of a brute. It was all very trying to a man with fine nerves. Several times he caught Aholibah's eye upon him, and he vaguely wondered if he had omitted anything — or, had he betrayed his feelings? In Paris the waiter who shows that he has ears, or eyes, or a heart, except in the exercise of his functions, is lost. He is bound to be caught and his telltale humanity scoured by instant dismissal. So when those fathomless eyes glittered in his direction, his knees trembled and a ball of copper invaded his throat. He could barely drag himself to her side and ask if he could help her. A burst of impertinent laughter greeted him, and Madeleine cried :—

“Your blond garçon seems smitten, Aholibah!” When Ambroise heard this awful phrase, his courage quite forsook him, and he withdrew into the obscurity of the hall. So white was he that the kindly Joseph asked solicitously if he were ill. Ambroise shook his head. The heat, he feebly explained, had

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

made his head giddy. Better drink some iced mineral water, was suggested — the other man could look after the party! But Ambroise would not hear of this, and feeling once more the beckoning gaze of Aholibah he marched bravely to her and was rewarded by a tap on the wrist.

“There, loiterer! Go call a carriage. The Prince is sleepy — dear sheep!” This last was a tender apostrophe to her snoring friend. Ambroise helped them into a fiacre. When it drove away it was past two o’clock; the house had to be closed. He walked slowly home to his little chamber on the Rue Puteaux, just off the Batignolles. But he could not sleep until the street-cleaners began the work of another day. . . . The Woman from Morocco was the scarlet colour of his troubled dreams. . . .

August had almost spent itself, and Aholibah remained in the arid and flavourless town. Her intimate friends had weeks earlier gone to Trouville, to Dinard, to Ostende, to Hombourg, even as far as Brighton; but she lingered, seemingly from perversity. She came regularly to the café about eleven, always in company with her Prince, and was untiringly served by Ambroise. He was rewarded for his fidelity with many valuable tips and latterly with gifts — for on being questioned he was forced to admit that gratuities had to be shared with the other waiters. He was so amiable, his smile so win-

VISIONARIES

ning, his admiration so virginal, that Aholibah kept him near her. Her Prince drank, sulked, or grumbled as much as ever. He was bored by the general heat and the dulness, yet made no effort to escape either. One night they entered after twelve o'clock. Aholibah was in vicious humour and snapped at her garçon. Dog-like he waited upon her, an humble, devoted helot. He overheard her say to her companion that she must have lost the purse at the Folies-Bergères.

"Well, go to the Rue de la Paix to-morrow and buy another," was the reply.

"I can't replace that purse. Besides, it was a prized gift —"

"From your sainted mother in heaven!" he sneered.

Ambroise saw the windows of her eyes close with a snap, and he moved away, fearing to be present in the surely impending quarrel. He remembered the purse. It was a long gold affair, its tiny links crusted with precious pearls — emeralds, rubies, diamonds. And the top he saw before him with ease, for its pattern was odd — a snake's head with jaws distended by a large amethyst. Yes, it was unique, that purse. And its value must have been bewildering for any but the idle rich. Ah! how he hated all this money, coming from nowhere, pouring in golden streams nowhere. He was not a revolutionist, — not even a socialist, — but there were times when he could have taken the neck of the

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

Prince between his strong fingers and choked out his worthless life. These attacks of envy were short-lived — he could not ascribe them to the reading of the little hornet-like anarchist sheet, *Père Peinard*, which the other waiters lent him ; rather was it an excess of bile provoked by the coveted beauty of Aholibah.

She usurped his day dreams, his night reveries. He never took a step without keeping her memory in the foreground. When he closed his eyes, he saw scarlet. When he opened them, he felt her magnetic glance upon him, though she was far from the café. His one idea was to speak with her. His maddest wish assumed the shape of a couple walking slowly arm in arm through the Bois—*she* was the woman ! But this particular vision bordered on delirium, and he rarely indulged in it. . . . He stooped to look under the chairs, under the table, for the missing treasure. It was not to be seen. Indolently the Prince watched him as he peered all over the café, out on the terrace. Aholibah was deeply preoccupied. She sipped her wine without pleasure. Her brows were thunderous. The cart-wheel hat was tipped low over them. Several times Ambroise sought her glance. He could have sworn that she was regarding him steadily. So painful became the intensity of her eyes that he withdrew in confusion. His mind was made up at last.

The next day was for him a free one. He

VISIONARIES

wandered up and down the Rue de la Paix staring moodily into the jewellers' windows. That night, though he could have stayed away from the café, he returned at ten o'clock, and luckily enough was needed. Joseph greeted him effusively. The "mast," the thin fellow from Marseilles, had gone home with a splitting headache. Would Ambroise stay and serve his usual table? To his immense astonishment and joy he saw her enter alone. He took her wraps and seated her on her favourite divan near an electric fan. Then he stared expectantly at the door. But her carriage had driven away. Was a part of his dream coming true? He closed his eyes, and straightway saw scarlet. Then he went for wine, without taking her order.

Aholibah was preoccupied. She played with the bracelet on her tawny left wrist. Occasionally she lifted her glass, or else tossed her hair from her eyes. If any stranger ventured near her, she began to hum insolently, or spoke earnestly with Ambroise. He was in the eleventh heaven of the Persians. Two Ambroises appeared to be in him: one served his lady, spoke with her; the other from afar contemplated with the ecstasy of a hasheesh eater his counterfeit brother. It was an exquisite sensation.

"The purse—has Mademoiselle—" He stammered.

"No," she crisply answered.

"Can it never be duplicated? Perhaps—"

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

"Never. It is impossible. It was made in Africa."

"But—but—" he persisted. His bearing was so peculiar that she bent upon him her dynamic gaze.

"What's the matter with you this evening, Ambroise? Have you come into a successful lottery ticket? Or—" She was suspiciously looking at him. "Or—you haven't found *it*?"

He nodded his head, his face beatific with joy. He resembled the youthful Saint George after slaying the dragon. She was startled. Her eyes positively lightened; he listened for the attendant peal of thunder.

"Speak out, you booby. Cornichon! Where did you find it? Let me see it—at once." All fire and imperiousness, she held out grasping fingers. He shook. And then carefully he drew from the inside pocket of his coat, the purse. She snatched it. Yes—it was her purse. And yet there was something strange about it. Had the stones been tampered with? She examined it searchingly. She boasted a jeweller's knowledge of diamonds and rubies. One of the stones had been transposed, that she could have sworn. And how different the expression of the serpent's eyes—small carbuncles. No—it was not her purse! She looked at Ambroise. He was paling and redening in rapid succession.

"It is *not* my purse! How did this come into your possession? It is very valuable,

VISIONARIES

quite as valuable as mine. But the eyes of my serpent were not so large—I mean the carbuncles. Ambroise—look at me! I command you! Where did you find this treasure —cher ami!” Her seductive voice lingered on the last words as if they were a morsel of delicious fruit. He leaned heavily on the table and closed his eyes to shut out her face—but he only saw scarlet. He heard scarlet.

“I—I—bought the thing because—you missed the other—” He could get no further. She smiled, showing her celebrated teeth.

“You bought the thing—*hein?* You must be a prince in disguise—Ambroise! And I have just lost *my* Prince! Perhaps—you thought—you audacious boy—”

He kept his eyes closed. She was in a corner of the room—quite empty—the other waiters were on the terrace. She weighed his appearance and smiled mysteriously; her smile, her glance, and her scarlet gowns were her dramatic assets. Then she spoke in a low voice—a contralto like the darker tones of an English horn:—

“I fancy I'll keep your thoughtful *gift*—Ambroise. And now, like a good boy, get a fiacre for me!” She went away, leaving him standing in the middle of the room, a pillar of burning ice. When Joseph spoke to him he did not answer. Then they took him by the arm, and he fell over in a seizure which, asserted the practical head waiter, was caused by indigestion.

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

II

ACROSS THE STYX

It was raining on the Left Bank. The chill of a November afternoon cut its way through the doors of the Café La Source in the Boul' Mich' and made shiver the groups of young medical students who were reading or playing dominos. Ambroise Nettier, older, thinner, paler, waited carefully on his patrons. He had been in the hospital with brain fever, and after he was cured, one of the students secured him a position at this café in the Quartier. He had been afraid to go back to the Café Riche; Joseph had harshly discharged him on that terrible night; alone, without a home, without a penny, his savings gone, his life insurance hypothecated,—it had been intended for the benefit of his parents,—his clothes, his very trunk gone, and plunged in debt to his fellow-waiters, his brain had succumbed to the shock. But Ambroise was young and strong; when he left the hospital he was relieved to find that he no longer saw scarlet. He was a healed man. He had intended to seek for a place at the Café Cardinal, but it was too near the Café Riche — he might meet old acquaintances, might be asked embarrassing questions. So he gladly accepted his present opportunity.

The dulness of the day waxed with its waning. It was nearly six o'clock when the door

VISIONARIES

slowly opened and Aholibah entered. She was alone. Her scarlet plumage was wet, and she was painted like a Peruvian war-god. She did not appear so brilliant a bird of paradise—or elsewhere—as at the aviary across the water. Yet her gaze was as forthright as ever. She sat on a divan between two domino parties, and was hardly noticed by the fanatics of that bony diversion. Recognizing Ambroise, she made a sign to him. It was some minutes before he could reach her table; he had other orders. When he did, she said she wanted some absinthe. He stared at her. Yes, absinthe—she had discarded iced wines. The doctor told her that cold wine was dangerous. He still stared. Then she held up the purse. It was a mere shell; all the stones save the amethyst in the mouth of the serpent were gone. She laughed shrilly. He went for the drink. She lighted a cigarette. . . .

Every night for six months she haunted the café. She was always unattended, always in excellent humour. She made few friends among the students. Her scarlet dress grew shabbier. Her gloves and boots were pitiful to Ambroise, who recalled her former splendours, her outrageous extravagances. Why had fortune flouted her! Why had she let it, like water, escape through her jewelled, indifferent fingers! He made no inquiries. She vouchsafed none. They were now on a different footing. Tantalizingly she dangled the purse under his nose as he

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

brought her absinthe — always this opalescent absinthe. She drank it in the morning, in the afternoon, at night. She seldom spoke save to Ambroise. And he — he no longer saw scarlet, for the glorious tone of her hat and gown had vanished. They were rusty red, a carrotty tint. Her face was like the mask of *La Buveuse d'Absinthe*, by Felicien Rops; her eyes, black wells of regard; her hair without lustre, and coarse as the mane of a horse. Aholibah no longer manifested interest in the life of Paris. She did not read or gossip. But she still had money to spend.

The night he quarrelled with his new patron, Ambroise was not well. All the day his head had pained him. When he reached La Source, the dame at the cashier's desk told him that he was in for a scolding. He shrugged his thin shoulders. He didn't care very much. Later the prophesied event occurred. He had been much too attentive to the solitary woman who drank absinthe day and night. The patron did not propose to see his establishment, patronized as it was by the shining lights of medicine — !

Ambroise changed his clothes and went away without a word. He was weary of his existence, and a friend who shared his wretched room in the Rue Mouffetard had apprised him of a vacant job at a livelier resort, the Café Vacchette, commonly known as the Café Rasta. There he would earn more tips, though the

VISIONARIES

work would be more fatiguing. And — the Morocco Woman might not follow him. He hurried away.

III

AVERNUS

She sat on a divan in the corner when he entered the Vachette for the first time. He said nothing, nor did he experience either a thrill of pleasure or disgust. The other waiters assured him that she was an old customer, sometimes better dressed, yet never without money. And she was liberal. He took her usual order, but did not speak to her, though she played with the purse as if to tempt him — it had become for him a symbol of their lives. A quick glance assured him that the amethyst had disappeared. She was literally drinking *his* gift away in absinthe. The spring passed, and Ambroise did not regain his former health. His limbs were leaden, his head always heavy. The alert waiter was transformed. He took his orders soberly, executed them soberly, — he was still a good routinier ; but his early enthusiasm was absent. Something had gone from him that night ; as she went to her carriage with her scornful, snapping, petulant *Ça !* — he felt that his life was over. Aholibah watched like a cat every night ; he was not on for day duty. She never came to the Rasta before dark. The story of her infatuation for the well-bred, melancholy

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

garçon was noised about ; but it did not endanger his position, as at La Source. He paid little attention to the jesting, and was scrupulously exact in his work. But the sense of his double personality began to worry him again. He did not see scarlet as of old ; he noticed when his eyes were closed that the apparition of a second Ambroise swam into the field of his vision. And he was positively certain that this spectre of himself saw scarlet — the attitude of his double assured him of the fact. Simple-minded, ignorant of cerebral disorders, loyal, and laborious, Ambroise could not speak of these disquieting things — indeed, he only worked the more. . . .

At last, one night in late summer, she did not appear. It was after a day when she had sung more insolently than ever, drunk more than her accustomed allowance, and had shown Ambroise the purse — the sockets of the serpent's eyes untenanted by the beautiful carbuncles. Apathetic as he had become, he was surprised at her absence. It was either caprice or serious illness. She had dwindled to a skeleton, with a maleficent smile. Her teeth were yellow, her hands become claws, the scarlet of her clothes a drab hue, the plumes on her hat gone. Ambroise wondered. About midnight a mean-looking fellow entered and asked for him. A lady, a very ill lady, was in a coupé at the door. He hurried out. It was Aholibah. Her eyes were glazed and her lips black and cracked. She tried to croon, in a hoarse voice : —

VISIONARIES

"I am the Woman of Morocco!" But her head fell on the window-sill of the carriage. Ambroise lifted the weary head on his shoulder. His eyes were so dry that they seemed thirsty. The old glamour gripped him. The cabman held the reins and waited; it was an every-night occurrence for him. The starlight could not penetrate to the Boulevard through the harsh electric glare; and the whirring of wheels and laughter of the café's guests entered the soul of Ambroise like steel nails. She opened her eyes.

"I am that Aholibah . . . a witness through waste Asia . . . that the strong men and the Captains knew . . ." This line of Swinburne's was pronounced in the purest English. Ambroise did not understand. Then followed some rapidly uttered jargon that might have been Moorish. He soothed her, and softly passed his hand over her rough and dishevelled hair. His heart was bursting. She was after all his Aholibah, his first love. A crowd gathered. He asked for a doctor. A dozen students ran in a dozen different directions. The tired horse stamped its feet impatiently, and once it whinnied. The coachman lighted his pipe and watched his dying fare. Some wag sang a drunken lyric, and Ambroise repeated at intervals:—

"Please not so close, Messieurs. She needs air." Then she moved her head and murmured:

THE PURSE OF AHOLIBAH

"Where's — my Prince? My — Prince Ambroise — I have something — " Her head fell back on his shoulder with a rigid jerk. In her clenched fingers he recognized his purse — smudged, torn, the serpent mouth gaping, the eyes empty. . . . And for the last time Ambroise saw scarlet — saw scarlet double. His two personalities had separated, never to merge again.

IV

REBELS OF THE MOON

"On my honour, friend," Zarathustra answered, "what thou speakest of doth not exist : there is no devil nor hell. Thy soul will be dead even sooner than thy body : henceforth fear naught."

THE moon, a spiritual gray wafer, fainted in the red wind of a summer morning as the two men leaped a ditch soft with mud. The wall was not high, the escape an easy one. Crouching, their clothes the colour of clay, they trod cautiously the trench, until opposite a wood whose trees blackened the slow dawn. Then, without a word, they ran across the road, and, in a few minutes, were lost in the thick under-brush of the little forest. It was past four o'clock and the dawn began to trill over the rim of night; the east burst into stinging sun rays, while the moving air awoke the birds and sent scurrying around the smooth green park a cloud of golden powdery dust. . . .

Arved and Quell stood in a secret glade and looked at each other solemnly—but only for a moment. Laughter, unrestrained laughter, frightened the squirrels and warned them that they were still in danger.

REBELS OF THE MOON

"Well, we've escaped this time," said the poet.

"Yes; but how long?" was the sardonic rejoinder of the painter.

"See here, Quell, you're a pessimist. You are never satisfied; which, I take it, is a neat definition of pessimism."

"I don't propose to chop logic so early in the morning," was the surly reply. "I'm cold and nervous. Say, did you lift anything before we got away?" Arved smiled the significant smile of a drinking man.

"Yes, I did. I waited until Doc McKracken left his office, and then I sneaked *this*." The severe lines in Quell's face began to swim together. He reached out his hand, took the flask, and then threw back his head. Arved watched him with patient resignation.

"Hold on there! Leave a dozen drops for a poor maker of rhymes," he chuckled, and soon was himself gurgling the liquor.

They arose, and after despairing glances at their bespattered garments, trudged on. In an hour, the pair had reached the edge of the forest, and, as the sun sat high and warm, a rest was agreed upon. But this time they did not easily find a hiding-place. Fearing to venture nearer the turnpike, hearing human sounds, they finally retired from the clearing, and behind a moss-etched rock discovered a cool resting-place on the leafy floor.

At full length, hands under heads, brains mellowed by brandy, the men summed up the

VISIONARIES

situation. Arved was the first to speak. He was tall, blond, heavy of figure, and his beard hung upon his chest. His dissatisfied eyes were cynical when he rallied his companion. A man of brains this, but careless as the grass.

"Quell, let us think this thing out carefully. It is nearly six o'clock. At six o'clock the cells will be unlocked, and then, — well, McKracken will damn our bones, for he gets a fat board fee from my people, and the table is not so cursed good at the Hermitage that he misses a margin of profit! What will he do? Set the dogs after us? No, he daren't; we're not convicts — we're only mad folk." He smiled good-humouredly, though his white brow was dented as if by harsh thoughts.

Quell's little bloodshot eyes stared up into a narrow channel of foliage, at the end of which was a splash of blue sky. He was mean-appearing, with a horselike head, his mustache twisted into a savage curl. His forehead was abnormal in breadth and the irritable flashes of fire in his eyes told the story of a restless soul. The nostrils expanded as he spoke:—

"We're only mad folk, as you say; nevertheless, the Lord High Keeper will send his police patrol wagon after us in a jiffy. He went to bed dead full last night, so his humour won't be any too sweet when he hears that several of his boarders have vanished. He'll miss you more than me; I'm not at the first table with you swells."

REBELS OF THE MOON

Quell ended his speech with so disagreeable an inflection that Arved was astonished. He looked around and spat at a beetle.

"What's wrong with you, my hearty? I believe you miss your soft iron couch. Or did you leave it this morning left foot foremost? Anyhow, Quell, don't get on your ear. We'll push to town as soon as it's twilight, and I know a little crib near the river where we can have all we want to eat and drink. Do you hear—drink!" Quell made no answer. The other continued:—

"Besides, I don't see why you've turned sulky simply because your family sent you up to the Hermitage. It's no disgrace. In fact, it steadies the nerves, and you can get plenty of booze."

"If you have the price," snapped his friend.

"Money or no money, McKracken's asylum—no, it's bad taste to call it that; his retreat, ah, there's the word!—is not so awful. I've a theory that our keepers are crazy as loons; though you can't blame them, watching us, as they must, from six o'clock in the morning until midnight. Say, why were you put away?"

"Crazy, like yourself, I suppose." Quell grinned.

"And now we're cured. We cured ourselves by flight. How can they call us crazy when we planned the job so neatly?"

Arved began to be interested in the sound of his own voice. He searched his pockets and

VISIONARIES

after some vain fumbling found a half package of cigarettes.

"Take some and be happy, my boy. They are boon-sticks indeed." Quell suddenly arose.

"Arved, what were you sent up for, may I ask?"

The poet stretched his big legs, rolled over on his back again, and scratching his tangled beard, smoked the cigarette he had just lighted. In the hot hum of the woods there was heard the occasional dropping of pine cones as the wind fanned lazy music from the leaves. They could not see the sun; its power was felt. Perspiration beaded their shiny faces and presently they removed collars and coats, sitting at ease in shirt-sleeves. . . . Arved's tongue began to speed:—

"Though I've only known you twenty-four hours, my son, I feel impelled to tell you the history of my happy life—for happiness has its histories, no matter what the poets say. But the day is hot, our time limited. Wait until we are recaptured, then I'll spin you a yarn."

"You expect to get caught for sure?"

"I do. So do you. No need to argue—your face tells me that. But we'll have the time of our life before they gather us in. Anyhow, we'll want to go back. The whole world is crazy, but ashamed to acknowledge it. We are not. Pascal said men are so mad that he who would not be is a madman of a new kind. To escape ineffable dulness is the privilege of

REBELS OF THE MOON

the lunatic; the lunatic, who is the true aristocrat of nature—the unique man in a tower of ivory, the elect, who, in samite robes, traverses moody gardens. Really, I shudder at the idea of ever living again in yonder stewpot of humanity, with all its bad smells. To struggle with the fools for their idiotic prizes is beyond me. The lunatic asylum—”

“Can’t you find some other word?” asked Quell, dryly.

“—is the best modern equivalent for the tub of Diogenes—he who was the first Solitary, the first Individualist. To dream one’s dreams, to be alone—”

“How about McKracken and the keepers?”

“From the volatile intellects of madmen are fashioned the truths of humanity. Mental repose is death. All our modern theocrats, politicians,—whose minds are sewers for the people,—and lawyers are corpses, their brains dead from feeding on dead ideas. Motion is life—mad minds are always in motion.”

“Let up there! You talk like the doctor chaps over at the crazy crib,” interrupted Quell.

“Ah, if we could only arrange our dreams in chapters—as in a novel. Sometimes Nature does it for us. There is really a beginning, a development, a dénouement. But, for the most of us, life is a crooked road with weeds so high that we can’t see the turn of the path. Now, my case—I’m telling you my story after all—my case is a typical one of the artistic

VISIONARIES

sort. I wrote prose, verse, and dissipated with true poetic regularity. It was after reading Nietzsche that I decided to quit my stupid, sinful ways. Yes, you may smile! It was Nietzsche who converted me. I left the old crowd, the old life in Paris, went to Brittany, studied new rhythms, new forms, studied the moon; and then people began to touch their foreheads knowingly. I was suspected simply because I did not want to turn out sweet sonnets about the pretty stars. Why, man, I have a star in my stomach! Every poet has. We are of the same stuff as the stars. It was Marlowe who said, 'A sound magician is a mighty god.' He was wrong. Only the mentally unsound are really wise. This the ancients knew. Even if Gerard de Nerval did walk the boulevards trolling a lobster by a blue ribbon—that is no reason for judging him crazy. As he truly said, 'Lobsters neither bark nor bite; and they know the secrets of the sea!' His dreams simply overflowed into his daily existence. He had the courage of his dreams. Do you remember his declaring that the sun never appears in dreams? How true! But the moon does, 'sexton of the planets,' as the crazy poet Lenau called it—the moon which is the patron sky-saint of men with brains. Ah, brains! What unhappiness they cause in this brainless world, a world rotten with hypocrisy. A poet polishes words until they glitter with beauty, charging them with fulminating meaning—straightway he is called

REBELS OF THE MOON

mad by men who sweat and toil on the stock exchange. Have you ever, my dear Quell, watched those little, grotesque brokers on a busy day? No? Well, you will say that no lunatic grimacing beneath the horns of the moon ever made such ludicrous, such useless, gestures. And for what? Money! Money to spend as idiotically as it is garnered. The world is crazy, I tell you, crazy, to toil as it does. How much cleverer are the apes who won't talk, because, if they did, they would be forced to abandon their lovely free life, put on ugly garments, and work for a living. These animals, for which we have such contempt, are freer than men; they are the Supermen of Nietzsche — Nietzsche whose brain mirrored both a Prometheus and a Napoleon." Quell listened to this speech with indifference. Arved continued:—

"Nor was Nietzsche insane when he went to the asylum. His sanity was blinding in its brilliancy; he voluntarily renounced the world of foolish faces and had himself locked away where he would not hear its foolish clacking. O Silence! gift of the gods, deified by Carlyle in many volumes and praised by me in many silly words! My good fellow, society, which is always hypocritical, has to build lunatic asylums in self-defence. These polite jails keep the world in countenance; they give it a standard. If *you* are behind the bars —"

"Speak for yourself," growled Quell.

"Then the world knows that you are crazy

VISIONARIES

and that *it* is not. There is no other way of telling the difference. So a conspiracy of fools, lawyers, and doctors is formed. If you do not live the life of the stupid: cheat, lie, steal, smirk, eat, dance, and drink — then you are crazy! That fact agreed upon, the hypocrites, who are quite mad, but cunning enough to dissemble, lock behind bolted doors those free souls, the poets, painters, musicians — artistic folk in general. They brand our gifts with fancy scientific names, such as Megalomania, Paranoia, *Folie des grandeurs*. Show me a genius and I'll show you a madman — according to the world's notion."

"There you go again," cried Quell, arising to his knees. "Genius, *I* believe, is a disease of the nerves; and I don't mind telling you that I consider poets and musicians quite crazy."

Arved's eyes were blazing blue signals.

"But, my dear Quell, are not all men mad at some time or another? Madly in love, religiously mad, patriotically insane, and idiotic on the subject of clothes, blood, social precedence, handsome persons, money? And is it not a sign of insanity when one man claims sanity for his own particular art? Painting, I admit, is —"

"What the devil do you know about painting?" Quell roughly interposed; "you are a poet and, pretending to love all creation, — altruism, I think your sentimental philosophers call it, — have the conceit to believe you bear a star in

REBELS OF THE MOON

your stomach when it is only a craving for rum. I've been through the game."

He began to pace the sward, chewing a blade of grass. He spoke in hurried, staccato phrases :—

" Why was I put away? Listen: I tried to paint the sun,—for I hate your moon and its misty madness. To put this glorious furnace on canvas is, as you will acknowledge, the task of a god. It never came to me in my dreams, so I wooed it by day. Above all, I wished to express truth; the sun is black. Think of an ebon sun fringed with its dazzling photosphere! I tried to paint sun-rhythms, the rhythms of the quivering sky, which is never still even when it seems most immobile; I tried to paint the rhythms of the atmosphere, shivering as it is with chords of sunlight and chromatic scales as yet unpainted. Like Oswald Alving in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, my last cry will be for 'the sun.' How did my friends act? What did the critics say? A black sun was too much for the world, though astronomers have proven my theory correct. The doctors swore I drank too much absinthe; the critics said a species of optical madness had set in; that I saw only the peripheral tints—I was yellow and blue crazy. Perhaps I was, perhaps I am. So is the fellow crazy who invented wireless telegraphy; so is the man off his base who invents a folding bird cage. We are all crazy, and the craziest gang are our doctors at the Hermitage." He jerked his

VISIONARIES

thumb over his shoulder. Arved rolled his handsome head acquiescingly.

"You poets and musicians are trying to compass the inane. You are trying to duplicate your dreams, dreams without a hint of the sun. The painter at least copies or interprets real life ; while the composer dips his finger in the air, making endless sound-scrolls — noises with long tails and whirligig decorations like foolish fireworks — though I think the art of the future will be pyrotechnics. Mad, mad, I tell you ! But whether mad or not matters little in our land of freedom, where all men are born unequal, where only the artists are sad. They are useless beings, openly derided, and when one is caught napping, doing something that offends church or State or society, he is imprisoned. Mad, you know ! No wonder anarchy is thriving, no wonder every true artist is an anarch, unavowed perhaps, yet an anarch, and an atheist."

"Not so fast !" interrupted Arved. "I'm an anarchist, but I don't believe in blowing up innocent policemen. Neither do you, Quell. You wouldn't hurt a bartender ! Give an anarchist plenty to drink, and he sheds his anarchy like a shirt. There are, I have noticed, three stages in the career of a revolutionist: destruction, instruction, construction. He begins the first at twenty, at forty he is teaching, at sixty he believes in society — especially if he has money in the bank." Quell regarded the speaker sourly.

REBELS OF THE MOON

"You are a wonder, Arved. You fly off on a wild tangent stimulated by the mere sound of a word. Who said anything about dynamite-anarchy? There's another sort that men of brains—madmen if you will—believe and indirectly teach. Emerson was one, though he hardly knew it. Thoreau realized it for him, however. Don't you remember his stern rebuke when Emerson visited him in Concord jail: 'Henry, why art thou here?' meekly inquired the mystic man. 'Ralph, why art thou *not* here?' was the counter-question. Thoreau had brave nerves. To live in peace in this malicious swamp of a world we must all wear iron masks until we are carted off to the *domino-park*; pious people call it the cemetery. Now, I'm going to sleep. I'm tired of all this jabbering. We are crazy for sure, or else we wouldn't talk so much."

Arved grumbled, "Yes, I've noticed that when a man in an asylum begins to suspect his keepers of madness he's mighty near lunacy himself."

"You have crazy blue eyes, Arved! Where's that flask — I'm dry again! Let's sleep."

They drained the bottle and were soon dozing, while about them buzzed the noon in all its torrid splendour.

When they awoke it was solid night. They yawned and damned the darkness, which smelt like stale india-rubber, so Quell said. They cursed life and the bitter taste in their mouths.

VISIONARIES

Quell spoke of his thirst in words that startled the easy-going Arved, who confessed that if he could rid himself of the wool in his throat, he would be comparatively happy. Then they stumbled along, bumping into trees, feeling with outstretched arms, but finding nothing to guide them save the few thin stars in the torn foliage overhead. Without watches, they could catch no idea of the hour. The night was far spent, declared Arved; he discovered that he was very hungry. Suddenly, from the top of a steep, slippery bank they pitched forward into the highroad.

Arved put out his hand, searching for his comrade. "Quell, Quell!" he whispered. Quell rose darkly beside him, a narrow lath of humanity. Locking arms, both walked briskly until, turning a sharp, short corner, they beheld, all smiling in the night, a summer garden, well lighted and full of gay people, chattering, singing, eating, drinking — happy! The two fugitives were stunned for a moment by such a joyful prospect. Tears came slowly to their eyes, yet they never relaxed their gait. Arriving at an outlying table and seats, they bethought themselves of their appearance, of money, of other disquieting prospects; but, sitting down, they boldly called a waiter.

Luckily it was a country girl who timidly took their order for beer and sandwiches. And they drank eagerly, gobbling the food as soon as it came, ordering more so noisily that they at-

REBELS OF THE MOON

tracted attention. The beer made them brave. As they poured down glass after glass, reckless of the reckoning, insolent to the servant, they began wrangling over the subject that had possessed their waking hours.

"Look here, Quell!" Arved exclaimed crustily, "you said I had crazy blue eyes. What about your own red ones? Crazy! Why, they glow now like a rat's. Poets may be music-mad, drunk with tone—"

"And other things," sneered the painter.

"—but at least their work is great when it endures; it does not fade away on rotten canvas."

"Now, I know you ought to be in the Brain-College, Arved, where your friends could take the little green car that goes by the grounds and see you on Sunday afternoons if weather permits."

His accent seemed deliberately insulting to Arved, who, however, let it pass because of their mutual plight. If they fell to fighting, detection would ensue. So he answered in placatory phrases:—

"Yes, my friend, we both belong to the same establishment, for we are men of genius. As the cat said to Alice, 'We must be mad or else we shouldn't be here.' I started to tell you why my people thought I had better take the cure. I loved the moon too much and loathed sunlight. If I had never tried to write lunar poetry—the tone quality of music combined with the pictorial evocation of painting—I

VISIONARIES

might be in the bosom of my family now instead of — ”

“ Drinking with a crazy painter, eh ? ” Quell was very angry. He shouted for drinks so rapidly that he alarmed the more prudent Arved; and as they were now the last guests, the head waiter approached and curtly bade them leave. In an instant he was dripping with beer thrown at him — glass and all — by the irate Quell. A whistle sounded, two other waiters rushed out, and the battle began. Arved, aroused by the sight of his friend on the ground with three men hammering his head, gave a roar like the trumpeting of an elephant. A chair was smashed over a table, and, swinging one-half of it, he made a formidable onslaught. Two of the waiters were knocked senseless and the leader’s nose and teeth crushed in by the rude cudgel. The morose moon started up, a tragic hieroglyph in the passionless sky. Quell, seeing its hated disk, howled, his face aflame with exaltation. Then he leaped like a hoarsely panting animal upon the poet; a moment and they were in the grass clawing each other. And the moon foamed down upon them its magnetic beams until darkness, caused by a coarse blanket, enveloped, pinioned, smothered them. When the light shone again, they were sitting in a wagon, their legs tightly bound. . . .

They began singing. The attendant interrupted : —

REBELS OF THE MOON

"Will you fellows keep quiet? How can a man drive straight, listening to your cackle?"

Arved touched his temple significantly and nudged Quell.

"Another one of us. Another rebel of the moon!"

"Shut up or I'll gag you both!" imperiously commanded the doctor, as the wheels of the ambulance cut the pebbly road. They were entering the asylum; now they passed the porter's lodge. In the jewelled light of a senescent moon, his wife and little daughter gazed at them curiously, without semblance of pity or fear. Then, as if shot from the same vocal spring-board, the voices of poet and painter merged into crazy rhythmic chanting:—

"Rebels of the moon, rebels of the moon!
We are, we are, the rebels of the moon!"

And the great gates closed behind them with a brazen clangour — metal gates of the moon-rebels.

V

THE SPIRAL ROAD

There can be nothing good, as we know it, nor anything evil, as we know it, in the eye of the Omnipresent and the Omniscient.—*Oriental Proverb.*

I

THE STRAND OF DREAMS

“I MUST see him if only for a minute. I can’t go back to the city after coming so far. Please—” but the girl’s face disappeared and the rickety door, which had been opened on a chain, was slammed after this imperative speech, and Gerald Shannon found himself staring exasperatedly at its rusty exterior. To have travelled on foot such a distance only to be turned away like a beggar enraged him. Nor was the prospect of returning over the path which had brought him to Karospina’s house a cheering one. He turned and saw that a low, creeping mist had obliterated every vestige of the trail across the swamp lands. There was no sun, and the twilight of a slow yellow day in late September would soon, in complicity with the fog, leave him totally adrift on this remote strand—he could hear the curving fall and hiss

THE 'SPIRAL ROAD

of the breakers, the monotonous rumour of the sea. So he was determined to face Karospina, even if he had to force his way into the house.

Two hours earlier, at the little railway station, they had informed him that the road was easy flatland for the greater part of the way. He had offered money for a horse or even a wheel; but these were luxuries on this bleak, poverty-ridden coast. As there was no alternative, Gerald had walked rapidly since three o'clock. And he had not been told the truth about the road; where the oozying, green, unwholesome waters were not he stepped, sometimes sinking over his ankles in the soft mud. Not a sign of humanity served him for comfort or compass. He had been assured that if he kept his back to the sun he would reach his destination. And he did, but not without many misgivings. It was the vision of a squat tower-like building, almost hemmed in by a monster gas reservoir, fantastic wooden galleries, and the gigantic silhouettes of strange machinery, that relieved his mind. But this house and its surroundings soon repelled him. His reception was the final disenchantment.

He played a lively tattoo with his blackthorn stick on the panels of the door. For five minutes this continued, interspersed with occasional loud calls for Karospina. At last the siege was raised. After preliminary unboltings, unbarings, and the rattling of the chain, Gerald saw before him a middle-aged man with a smooth

VISIONARIES

face and closely shaven head, who quietly asked his name and business.

"I have a letter for you, Mr. Karospina—if you are that gentleman—and as I have put myself to much trouble in getting to you, I think I deserve a little consideration."

"A letter, my worthy sir! And for me? Who told you to come here? How do you know my name?" This angered the young man.

"It is from Prince K. *The Prince.* Now are you satisfied?" he added, as his questioner turned red and then paled as if the news were too startling for his nerves.

"Come in, come in!" he cried. "Mila, Mila, here is a guest. Fetch tea to the laboratory." He literally dragged Shannon within doors and led him across a stone corridor to a large room, but not before he had bolted and barred the entrance to his mysterious fortress. Seeing the other's look of quiet amusement, he laughed himself:—

"Wolves, my dear sir, wolves, *human* wolves, prowl on the beach at night, and while I have no treasures, it is well to be on the safe side. Mila, Mila, the tea, the tea." There was a passionate intensity in his utterance that attracted Gerald from his survey of the chamber. He saw that in the light Karospina was a much older man than he had at first supposed. But the broad shoulders, the thick chest, and short, powerful figure and bullet head belied his years. Incredulously his visitor asked himself if this

THE SPIRAL ROAD

were the wonderful, the celebrated Karospina, chemist, revolutionary, mystic, nobleman, and millionaire. A Russian, he knew that — yet he looked more like the monk one sees depicted on the canvases of the early Flemish painters. His high, wide brow and deep-set, dark eyes proclaimed the thinker ; and because of his physique, he might have posed as a prize-fighter.

He took the letter and read it as the door opened and the girl came in with the tea. She wore her hair braided in two big plaits which hung between her shoulders, and her bold, careless glance from eyes sea-blue made the Irishman forget his host and the rigours of the afternoon. A Russian beauty, with bare, plump arms, and dressed in peasant costume ; but — a patrician ! Her fair skin and blond hair filled him with admiration. What the devil ! — he thought, and came near saying it aloud.

“ My niece, Princess Mila Georgovics, Mr. Shannon.” Gerald acknowledged the introduction with his deepest bow. He was dazzled. He had come to this dreary place to talk politics. But now this was out of the question. And he began explaining to the Princess ; Mila he had fancied was some slattern waiting on the old fanatic of a prince. He told Mila this in a few words, and soon the pair laughed and chatted. In the meantime Karospina, who had finished the letter, began to pace the apartment. Apparently he had forgotten the others,

VISIONARIES

"Tea, tea, where's the tea?" he presently shouted. As they drank, he said: "The prince asks an impossibility, Mr. Shannon. Say to him, *no*, simply no; he will understand, and so will you, I hope. I'm done with all militant movements. I'm converted to the peace party. What's the use of liberty to people who won't know what to do with it when they get it? Tolstoy is right. Let the peasant be shown how to save his soul—that and a little to eat and drink and a roof are all he needs in this life."

Gerald was startled. He had expected to find an "advanced" leader of the Bakounine type. Instead, a man of the "vegetarian" order,—as he had heard them called,—who talked religion instead of dynamite;—and after all the bother of bringing the letter down to this remote country! Decidedly the princess was more enjoyable than a reformed anarchist. She was gazing at him seriously now, her society manner gone. Her nose, rather large for the harmony of her face, palpitated with eagerness. Evidently, thought Gerald, the young lady is the real revolutionist in this curious household. He also ventured to say so to her, but she did not meet his smiling declaration. Her uncle, irritated by his interrupted discourse, exclaimed:—

"Never mind what the Princess Mila thinks, Mr. Shannon. Women change their minds. The chief matter just now is that you cannot go away to-night. You would lose your way, perhaps be drowned. Can you sleep on a hard

THE SPIRAL ROAD

bed?" He was assured by Gerald that, if he had been turned away, he would have slept in an outhouse, even under one of those windmills he saw in such number on the strand. Karospina smiled.

"Hardly there—that is, if you expected to awaken." Then he left the room, saying that some one must see to the supper. His niece burst into laughter. Gerald joined in.

"He's always like that, fussy, nervous, but with a heart of gold, Mr.—Mr. Shannon. Thank you. It's an Irish name, is it not? And you look like an Irishman; a soldier, too, I fancy!"

Gerald blushed. "A soldier in the cause of humanity," he answered, "but no longer a hireling in the uniform of kings." He felt so foolish after this brave bit of rhetoric that he kept his eyes on the floor. In an instant she was at his side.

"Give me your hand—*comrade!*" she said, with a peculiar intonation. "Oh! if you only knew how I longed to meet the right men. Uncle is a convert—no, hardly a backslider; but he swears by the regenerating process instead of violence. Formerly the cleverest living chemist, he now—oh! I shame to say it—he now indulges in firework displays instead of manufacturing bombs with which to execute tyrants." She slowly dropped his hand and her eyes wore a clairvoyant expression. He was astounded.

VISIONARIES

"Fireworks! Doesn't the prince hold by his old faith—he, a pupil of Bakounine, Net-schajew, and Kropotkin?" Just then the prince came in, bearing a tray. He seemed happy.

"Here, sit down, dear sir, and partake of a few things. We live so far from civilization that we seldom get a good chicken. But eggs I can offer you, eggs and ham, cooked by me on an electric machine."

"You have no servants?" Gerald ventured.

"Not one. I can't trust them near my—
toys. The princess plays Chopin mazourkas after she makes the beds in the morning, and in the afternoon she is my assistant in the laboratory." Again the young man looked about him. If the room was a laboratory, where were the retorts, the oven, the phials, the jars, the usual apparatus of a modern chemist? He saw nothing, except an old-fashioned electric fan and a few dusty books. The fireworks—were those overgrown wheels and gaunt windmills and gas-house the secret of the prince's self-banishment to this dreary coast? What dreams did he seek to incarnate on this strand, in this queer tower, locked away from the world with a charming princess—a fairy princess whose heart beat with love for the oppressed, in whose hand he might some time see the blazing torch of freedom? He, himself, was enveloped by the hypnotism of the place. Mila spoke:—

"I fear I must leave you. I am studying tonight and—I go early to rest. Pray dine as

THE SPIRAL ROAD

well as you can, with such a chef." She smiled mischievously at her uncle, courtesied in peasant fashion to the bewildered Gerald, who put out his hand, fain to touch hers, and disappeared. The prince gazed inquiringly at the young man.

"Revolutionists soon become friends, do they not? The Princess Mila is part Russian, part Roumanian,—my sister married a Roumanian,—hence her implacable political attitude. I can't lead her back to civilized thinking. She sees war in the moon, sun, and stars. And I—I have forsaken violence. Ah! if I could only make the prince change. Bakounine's death had no effect; Netschajew's fate did not move him; nor was Illowski's mad attempt to burn down Paris with his incendiary symphony an example to our prince that those who take up the sword perish by the sword. Ah, Tolstoy, dear Leon Nikolaievitch, you showed me the true way to master the world by love and not by hate! Until I read—but there, it's late. Come with me to your room. You may smoke and sleep when you will. In the morning I will show you my—toys." They shook hands formally and parted.

His bed was hard, and his room cheerless, but anything, even a haymow, rather than walking back to the station. After he went to his bed, he rehearsed the day's doings from the three hours' ride in the train to the tower. How weary he was! Hark—some one played the

VISIONARIES

piano! A Chopin mazourka! It was the princess. Mila! How lovely her touch! . . . Mila! What a lovely name! A sleeping princess. A prince with such a sleepy head. How the girl could play . . . along the spiral road he saw the music glow in enigmatic figures of fire. . . .

II

THE PANACEA OF CORUSCATION

He seemed to be uttering her name when he awoke. It was daylight; the sun poured its rays over his face, and he asked himself how he could have fallen asleep leaving the lamp burning on the table near his bed. He must have slept long, for he felt rested, cheerful—happy. As he dressed he speculated whether it was the sunshine, or the prospect of going back to life, or—or—Did he wish to return so soon? He wondered what Mila was doing. Then he went into the stone corridor and coughed as a hint that he was up. Not a sound but the persistent fall at a distance of some heavy metallic substance. It must be Karospina in his workshop, at his rockets, pinwheels, torpedoes, and firecrackers. What a singular change in a bloodthirsty revolutionist. And how childish! Had he squandered his millions on futile experimentings? What his object, what his scheme, for the amelioration of mankind's woes? Gerald's stomach warned him that coffee and rolls were

THE SPIRAL ROAD

far dearer to him than the downfall of tyranny's bastions, and impatiently he began whistling. The rhythmic thud never ceased. He noticed an open door at the back of the house, and he went out, his long legs carrying him about the yard, toward the beach. The air was glorious, a soft breeze blowing landward from the ocean. He almost forgot his hunger in the face of such a spectacle. The breakers were racing in, and after crumbling, they scudded, a film of green, crested by cottony white, across the hard sand to the young man's feet. He felt exhilarated. And his hunger returned. Then Mila's voice sounded near him. She carried a basket and fairly ran in her eagerness.

"Mr. Shannon, Mr. Shannon, good Prince Gerald—" he was amazed; where could she have heard his Christian name?—"your breakfast. Wait—don't swim the seas to New York for it. Here it is." She opened the basket and handed him a jug of coffee and showed him the rolls inside. Without the slightest embarrassment he thanked her and drank his coffee, walking; he ate the bread, and felt, as he expressed it, like leading a forlorn hope. They went on, the cutting sunshine and sparkling breeze alluring them to vague distances. It was long after midday when they marched back at a slower pace, Gerald swinging the basket like a light-hearted boy, instead of the desperado he fancied himself.

Entering the house, Mila hunted up some cold

VISIONARIES

meat, and with fresh tea and stale bread they were contented. The formidable pyrotechnist did not appear, and so the young people enjoyed the day in each other's company. She conducted him like a river through the lands of sociology, Dostoevsky, and Chopin. She played, but made him sit in the hall, for the piano was in her private room. And then they began to exchange confidences. It was dusk before the prince returned, in the attire of a workingman, his face and hands covered with soot and grease. A hard day's labour, he said, and did not seem surprised to see Shannon.

After supper he asked Gerald if he would smoke a pipe with him in his laboratory. Mila must have bored him enough by this time! They lighted their pipes; but Mila refused to be sent away. She sat down beside her uncle and put her elbows on the table—white, strong arms she had, and Gerald only took his eyes from their pleasing contemplation to lift them to hers. He was fast losing what little prudence he had; he was a Celt, and he felt that he had known Mila for a century.

"Young man," said Prince Karospina, sharply, "you have the message I gave you last night! Well—and you will say *no*, to my beloved friend K., without knowing why. And you will think that you have been dealing with a man whose hard head has turned to the mush of human kindness,—an altruist. Ah! I know how you fellows despise the word. But what have Kro-

THE SPIRAL ROAD

potkin, Elisée Reclus, Jean Grave, or the rest accomplished? To build up, not to tear down, should be the object of the scientific anarch. Stop! You need not say the earth has to be levelled and ploughed before sowing the seed. That suits turnip fields, not the garden of humanity. Educate the downtrodden into liberty, is my message, not the slaughtering of monarchs. How am I going to go about it? Ah! that's my affair, my dear sir. After I read a certain book by Tolstoy, I realized that art was as potent an agent for mischief as the knout. Music — music is rooted in sex; it works miracles of evil — ”

“ Now, uncle, I won't hear a word against Chopin,” said Mila, looking toward Gerald for approval.

“ Music, Mila, in the hands of evil men is an instrument dangerous to religion, to civilization. What of Illowski and his crazy attack on Paris and St. Petersburg? You remember, Shannon! Leave Wagner out of the question — there is no fusion of the arts in his music drama — only bad verse, foolish librettos, dealing with monsters and gods, and indifferent scene-painting. Moreover, this new music is not understood by the world. Even if the whole of mankind could be assembled on the roof of the world and at a preconcerted signal made to howl the Marseillaise, it would not be educated to the heights I imagine. Stage plays — Shakespeare has no message for our days; Ibsen is an anarchist —

VISIONARIES

he believes in placing the torpedo under the social ark. Painting—it is an affair for state galleries and the cabinets of wealthy amateurs. Literature is a dead art—every one writes and reads and no one understands. Religion! Ah! Yes, religion; the world will be a blackened cinder or cometary gas before the love of God is stamped from its heart. But religion and art must go hand in hand. Divorced, art has fallen into the Slough of Despond; else has been transformed into an acrid poison wherewith men's souls are destroyed as if by a virulent absinthe. United with religion, art is purified. All art sprang from religion. All great art, from a Greek statue to a Gothic cathedral, from a Bach fugue to Michael Angelo, was religious. Therefore, if we are to reach the hearts of the people, we must make art the handmaid of religion.” He stopped for breath. Gerald interposed:—

“But, dear prince, you say ‘art.’ What art—painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, drama—?”

“One art,” harshly cried the now excited man, as he pounded the table with his hard fist. “One art, *my* art, the fusion of all the arts. I, Prince Igorovitch Karospina, tell you that I have discovered the secret of the arts never dreamed of by Wagner and his futile, painted music on a painted stage; I have gone, not to art, but to nature—colour, fire, the elements. The eye is keener than the ear, vision is easier comprehen-

THE SPIRAL ROAD

hended than tone. Ah! I have you interested at last."

He began walking as if to overtake a missing idea. His niece watched him cynically.

"I fear you are boring Mr. Shannon," she said in her most birdlike accents. Her uncle turned on her.

"I don't care if I am. Go to bed! I am nearing the climax of a lifetime, and I feel that I must talk to a sympathetic ear. You are not bored, dear friend. I have pondered this matter for more than thirty years. I have studied all the arts—painting particularly; and with colour, with colourful design I mean to teach mankind the great lessons of the masters and of religion."

"Ah, you will exhibit in large halls, panoramic pictures, I suppose," interrupted Shannon.

"Nothing of the sort," was the testy reply. "For thousands of years the world has been gazing upon dead stones and canvases, reading dead words. Dead—all, I tell you, all of these arts. And painting is only in two dimensions—a poor copy of nature. The theatre has its possibilities, but is too restricted in space. Music is alive. It moves; but its message is not articulate to *all*. I want an art that will be understood and admired at a glance by the world from pole to pole. I want an art that will live and move and tell a noble tale. I want an art that will appeal to the eye by its colouring and the soul by its beautiful designs. Where is

VISIONARIES

that legend-laden art? Hitherto it has not existed. I have found it. I have tracked it down until I am the master who by a touch can liberate elemental forces, which will not destroy, like those of Illowski's, but will elevate the soul and make mankind one great nation, one loving brotherhood. Ah! to open once more those doors of faith closed by the imperious dogmas of science—open them upon a lovely land of mystery. Mankind must have mystery. And beyond each mystery lies another. This will be our new religion."

Gerald had caught the enthusiasm of this swelling prologue and rose, his face alight with curiosity.

"And that art is—is—?" he stammered.

"That art is—pyrotechny." It was too much for the young man's nerves, and he fell back in his chair, purple with suppressed laughter. Angrily darting at him and catching his left shoulder in a vicelike grip, Karospina growled:

"You fool, how dare you mock something you know nothing of?" He shook his guest roughly.

"Uncle, uncle, be patient! Tell Mr. Shannon, and he, too, will become a believer. I believe in you. I believe in him, Mr. Shannon. Don't sneer! Tell him, uncle." Mila's words, almost imploring in their tone, calmed the infuriated inventor, who left the room. He reentered in a moment, his head dripping, and he was grinning broadly.

"Whenever I encounter a refractory pattern

THE SPIRAL ROAD

in my fireworks — as you call them — I am compelled to throw a bucket of water over it to quench its too ardent spirits. I have just done the same to my own head, dear Mr. Shannon, and I ask your pardon for my rudeness. Get some fresh tea, Mila, strong tea, Mila.” Pipes were relighted and the conversation resumed.

“I forgot in my obsession, in what Jacob Boehme calls ‘the shudder of divine excitement,’ that I was talking to one of the uninitiated. I suppose you think by pyrotechny I mean the old-fashioned methods of set pieces, ghastly portraits in fire, big, spouting wheels, rockets, war scenes from contemporary history, seaside stuff, badly done—and flowery squibs. My boy, all that, still admired by our country cousins, is the very infancy of my art. In China, where nearly everything was invented ages ago, in China I learned the first principles, also the possibilities of the art of fireworks; yes, call it by its humble title. In China I have seen surprising things at night. Pagodas blown across the sky, an army of elephants in pursuit, and all bathed in the most divine hues imaginable. But their art suffers from convention. They accomplish miracles considering the medium they work in—largely gunpowder. And their art has no meaning, no message, no moral principle, no soul. Years ago I discovered all the aids necessary to the pyrotechnist. I am not a chemist for nothing. If I can paint a fair imitation of a Claude Monet on canvas, I can also

VISIONARIES

produce for you a colourless gas which, when handled by a virtuoso, produces astonishing illusions. In the open air, against the dark background of the horizon, I can show you the luminous dots planewise of the Impressionists; or I can give you the broad, sabrelike brushwork of Velasquez, or the imperial tintings of Titian. I can paint pictures on the sky. I can produce blazing symphonies. I will prove to you that colour is also music. This sounds as if I were a victim to that lesion of the brain called 'coloured-audition.' Perhaps! Not Helmholtz or Chevreul can tell me anything new in the science of optics. I am the possessor of the rainbow secrets—for somewhere in Iceland, a runic legend runs, there is a region vast as night, where all the rainbows—worn out or to be used—drift about in their vapoury limbo. I have the key to this land of dreams. Over the earth I shall float my rainbows of art like a flock of angels. With them I propose to dazzle the eyes of mankind, to arouse sleeping souls. From the chords of the combined arts I shall extort nobler cadences, nobler rhythms, for men to live by, for men to die for!"

Shannon was impressed. Through the smoke of his host's discourse he discovered genuine fire. The philosopher took his hand and led him to the window.

"Stand there a moment!" he adjured. Mila joined him and after turning the lamp to a pin-head of light, their shoulders touching—for the

THE SPIRAL ROAD

window was narrow — they peered into the night. They were on the side of the water. Suddenly Gerald exclaimed :—

“ What’s that light out at sea — far out ? It looks like the moon ! ”

“ It is the sun , ” coolly replied his companion. They saw arise from the waters a majestic, glowing sphere of light, apparently the size of the sun. It flooded the country with its glare, and after sailing nearly in front of the house it shrank into a scarlet cross not larger than a man’s hand. Then in a shower of sparks it ceased, its absence making the blackness almost corporeal. Instinctively the hands of the two indulged in a long pressure, and Mila quickly adjusted the lamp. But Gerald still stood at the window a prey to astonishment, terror, stupefaction.

Karospina entered. His face was slightly flushed and in his eyes there burned the sombre fire of the fanatic. Triumphant he regarded his young friend.

“ That was only a little superfluous gas — nothing I cared to show you. Read the newspapers to-morrow, and you will learn that a big meteor burst off the north coast the night before, and fell into the sea . ” Then he moved closer and whispered :—

“ The time is at hand. Within three weeks — not later than the middle of October — I shall make my first public test. ‘ Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains and to the

VISIONARIES

hills, to the rivers and to the valleys: Behold, I, *even* I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places.'"

His voice rose in passion, his face worked in anger, and he shook his clenched fists at an imaginary universe. So this man of peace was a destroyer, after all! Gerald aroused him. Again he asked pardon. Mila was nowhere to be seen, and with a sinking at the heart new to his buoyant temperament, Gerald bade the magician good night. It was arranged that he would leave the next day, for, like Milton, he was haunted by "the ghost of a linen decency." But that night he did not sleep, and no sound of music came to his ears from Mila's chamber. Once he tried to open his window. It was nailed down.

A gray day greeted his tired eyes. In an hour he was bidding his friends good-by and thanking them for their hospitality. He had hoped that Mila would accompany him a few steps on his long journey, but she made no sign beyond a despairing look at her uncle, who was surly, as if he had felt the reaction from too prolonged a debauch of the spirit. Gerald lit his pipe, kissed the hand of Mila with emphasis, and parted from them. He had not gone a hundred yards before he heard soft footsteps tracking him. He turned and was disappointed to see that it was only Karospina, who came up to him, breathing heavily, and in his catlike eyes the fixed expression of

THE SPIRAL ROAD

monomania. He stuttered, waving his arms aloft.

"The time is at hand and the end of all things shall be accomplished. You shall return for the great night. You shall hear of it in the world. Tell K. that I said *no!* He must be with us at the transfiguration of all things, when mankind shall go up the spiral road of perfection."

Gerald Shannon fairly ran to escape knowing more about the universal panacea. And when he turned for the last time the sea and tower and man were blotted out by wavering mists of silver.

III

THE FIERY CHARIOT

The young man soon heard of Karospina's project. A week before the event the newspapers began describing the experiments of the new Russian wonder-worker, but treated the matter with calm journalistic obliviousness to any but its most superficial aspects. A scientific pyrotechnist was a novelty, particularly as the experimentings were to be given with the aid of a newly discovered gas. Strange rumours of human levitations, of flying machines seen after dark at unearthly heights, were printed. This millionaire, who had expended fortunes in trying to accomplish what Maxim

VISIONARIES

and Langley had failed in achieving, was a good peg upon which to hang thrilling gossip. He promised to convince the doubting ones that at last man would come into the empire of the air, and by means of fireworks. In searching carefully all the published reports Gerald was relieved not to encounter the name of Mila.

That celebrated afternoon he found himself, after the distressingly crowded cars, in company with many thousands, all clamouring and jostling on the road to the tower. This time there were vehicles and horses, though not in any degree commensurate with the crowd; but the high tax imposed by the speculators gave him an opportunity of securing a seat with a few others in a carriage drawn by four horses. Gingerly they made their way down the narrow road — time was not gained, for the packed mass of humans refused to separate. Fuming at the delay, he was forced to console himself with smoking and listening to the stories told of Karospina and his miracles. They were exaggerated. Karospina here, Karospina there — the name of this modern magician was hummed everywhere in the brisk October air. A little man who occupied the seat with Shannon informed him that he knew some one who had worked for Karospina. He declared that it was no uncommon sight for the conjurer — he was usually called by that name — to float like a furled flag over his house when the sun had set.

THE SPIRAL ROAD

Also he had been seen driving in the sky a span of three fiery horses in a fiery chariot across the waters of the bay, while sitting by his side was the star-crowned Woman of the Apocalypse clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet. Gerald held his counsel; but the grandeur of the spectacle he had witnessed still shook his soul—if he had not been the victim of a hallucination! The journey seemed endless.

At last the strand came into view with the squat tower, the rusting machinery, and the reservoir back of the house. There were, however, changes in the scene. Within a quarter of a mile of the beach tents were set and booths erected. Seemingly all the city had rushed to this place, and the plain, with its swampy surfaces, was dotted by masses of noisy men and women. Gerald, finding that approach to the house was impossible from the land side, made a wide detour, and on reaching the shore he was gratified to find it empty. The local constabulary, powerless to fight off the mob near the house, had devoted their energies to clearing the space about the gas retorts. After much bother, and only by telling his name, did he pass the police cordon. Once inside, he rushed to the back door and found, oh! great luck—Mila. Dressed in white, to his taste she was angelic. He had great difficulty in keeping his arms pinioned to his side; but his eyes shone with the truth beating at the bars of his bosom, and

VISIONARIES

Mila knew it. He felt this and was light-headed in his happiness.

They greeted. Mila's face wore a serious expression.

"I'm very glad you have come down. I think uncle will be glad also. I am *happy* to see you again; I have missed you these past weeks. But my happiness is nothing just now, Gerald! [He started.] My uncle, you must speak with him. From brooding so much over the Holy Scriptures, and the natural excitement of his discoveries — they are so extraordinary, dear friend, that he means always to keep them to himself, for he rightly believes that the governments of the world would employ them for wicked purposes, war, the destruction of weaker nations — he has become overwrought. You may not know it, he has a very strong, sane head on his shoulders; but this scheme for lifting up the masses, I suspect, may upset his own equilibrium. And his constant study of the Apocalypse and the Hebraic revelations — it has filled him with strange notions. Understand me: a man who can swim in the air like a fish in the sea is apt to become unstrung. He has begun to identify himself with the prophets. He insists on showing biblical pictures, — worse still, appearing in them himself."

"How 'appearing in them'?" asked Gerald, wonderingly.

"In actual person. I, too, have promised to go with him."

THE SPIRAL ROAD

"In a transparency of fire, you mean? Isn't it dangerous?" She hung her head.

"No, in mid air, in a fiery chariot," she murmured.

"The Woman of the Apocalypse!" he cried. "Oh! Princess Mila, dearest Mila Georgovics, promise me that you will not risk such a crazy experiment." Gerald pressed his fingers to his throbbing temples.

"It is no experiment at all," she said, in almost inaudible tones; "*last night we flew over the house.*" He stared at her, his hands trembling, and no longer able to play the incredulous.

"But, dear friend, I fear one other thing; the gas which uncle has discovered is so tenuous that it is a million times lighter than air; but it is ever at a terrible tension—I mean it is dangerous if not carefully treated. Last summer, one afternoon, a valve broke and a large quantity escaped from the reservoir, luckily on the ocean side. It caused a storm and water-spouts, and destroyed a few vessels. The coruscating gas creates a vacuum into which the air rushes with incredible velocity. So promise me that while we are flying you will stay with the police at the gas machines and keep off the crowd. Promise!"

"But I shan't permit you to go up with this renegade to the revolutionary cause—" he began impetuously. She put warning fingers to her lips. In the white flowing robes of an antique priest, Karospina came out to them and took

VISIONARIES

Gerald by the hand. He was abstracted and haggard, and his eyes glared about him. He chanted in a monotone :—

“The time is at hand. Soon you will see the Angels of the Seals. I shall show the multitude Death on the Pale Horse and the vision of Ezekiel. And you shall behold the star called Wormwood, the great star of the third angel, which shall fall like a burning lamp upon the waters and turn them bitter. And at the last you will see the chariot of Elijah caught up to heaven in a fiery whirlwind. In it will be seated the Princess Mila — we, the conquerors of the wicked world.”

“Yes, but only as an image, an illusion,” ejaculated the unhappy lover, “not in reality.”

“As she is,” imperiously answered Karospina, and seizing Mila by the arm, said, “Come!” She threw a kiss to Gerald and in her eyes were tears. He saw them and could have wept himself. He followed the sacrificial pair as far as the reservoir, muttering warnings in which were mixed the fates of Phaethon and Simon Magus — that heretic who mimicked the miracles of the apostles.

It was now dark ; the order to extinguish all lights on the moor had been obeyed. Only a panting sound as if from a wilderness of frightened animals betrayed the presence of thousands. As long as the sun shone there had been a babel of sound ; at the disappearance of

THE SPIRAL ROAD

our parent planet, a hushed awe had fallen with the night. Gone the rude joking and wrangling, the crying of children, and the shrill laughter of the women. A bitter breeze swept across from the waters, and the stars were mere twinkling points.

Then from the vault of heaven darted a ribbon of emerald fire. It became a luminous spiral when it touched the sea of glass, which was like unto a floor of crystal. This was the sign of Karospina's undertaking, his symbol of the road to moral perfection. Gerald recalled Whistler's pyrotechnical extravaganzas. Following this came a pale moon which emerged from the north; a second, a third, a fourth, started up from the points of the compass, and after wabbling in the wind like gigantic balloons, merged overhead in an indescribable disk which assumed the features of Michael Angelo's Moses. Here is a new technique, indeed, thought Gerald; yet he could not detect its moral values.

A golden landscape was projected on land and sea. A central aisle of waters, paved by the golden rays of a lyric sun high overhead, was embellished on either side by the marmoreal splendours of stately palaces. An ilex inclined its graceful head to its liquid image; men moved the blocks that made famous in the mouth of the world Queen Dido's Carthage. Clouds of pearl-coloured smoke encircled the enchanting picture. And the galleys came and went in this symphonic, glittering spectacle.

VISIONARIES

"Turner would have died of envy," said Gerald aloud. There was a remarkable vibration of life, not as he had seen it in mechanical bioscopes, but the vivid life of earth and sunshine.

The scenes that succeeded were many : episodes from profane and sacred histories ; simulacra of the great saints. A war between giants and pygmies was shown with all its accompanying horrors. The firmament dripped crimson. The four cryptic creatures of Ezekiel's vision came out of the north, a great cloud of "infolding fire" and the colour was amber. A cyclopean and dazzling staircase thronged by moving angelic shapes, harping mute harps, stretched from sea to sky, melting into the milky way like the tail of a starry serpent. Followed the opening of the dread prophetic seals ; but, after an angel had descended from heaven, his face as the sun and at his feet pillars of fire, the people, prostrate like stalks of corn beaten by a tempest, worshipped in fear. These things were supernatural. The heavens were displaying the glory of God.

Not knowing whether the signs in the skies might be construed as blasphemous, and lost in fathomless admiration for the marvellous power of the wizard, Gerald sought to get closer to Karospina and Mila. But wedged in by uniformed men, and the darkness thick as an Egyptian plague, he despairingly awaited the apotheosis. His eyes were sated by the mira-

THE SPIRAL ROAD

cles of harmonies—noiseless harmonies. It was a new art, and one for the peoples of the earth. Never had the hues of the universe been so assembled, grouped, and modulated. And the human eye, adapting itself to the new synthesis of arabesque and rhythm, evoked order and symbolism from these novel chords of colour. There were solemn mountains of opalescent fire which burst and faded into flaming colonnades, and in an enchanting turquoise effervescence became starry spears and scimiters and sparkling shields, and finally the whole mass would reunite and evaporate into brilliant violet auroras or seven-tailed, vermillion-coloured comets. There were gleaming rainbows of unknown tints—strange scales of chromatic pigments; “a fiery snow without wind;” and once a sun, twice the size of our own, fell into the ocean; and Gerald could have sworn that he felt a wave of heated air as if from a furnace; that he heard a seething sound, as if white-hot metal had come in contact with icy water. Consumed by anxiety for Mila’s safety, he wished that these soundless girandoles, this apocalypse of architectural fire and weaving flame, would end.

He had not long to wait. A shrewd hissing apprised him that something unusual was about to occur. Like the flight of a great rocket a black object quickly mounted to the zenith. It did not become visible for several seconds; Gerald’s nerves cringed with apprehension. The apparition was an incandescent chariot;

VISIONARIES

in it sat Karospina, and beside him — oh ! the agony of her lover — Mila Georgovics. As the fiery horses swooped down, he could see her face in a radiant nimbus of meteors, which encircled the equipage. Karospina proudly directed its course over the azure route, and once he passed Gerald at a dangerously low curve earthward, shouting :—

“The Spiral! The Spiral!”

It was his last utterance ; possibly through some flaw in the mechanism, the chariot zig-zagged and then drove straight upon the reservoir. To the reverberation of smashed steel and blinding fulguration the big sphere was split open and Mila with Karospina vanished in the nocturnal gulf.

Gerald, stunned by the catastrophe, threw himself down, expecting a mighty explosion ; the ebon darkness was appalling after the scintillating rain of fire. But the liberated gas in the guise of an elongated cloud had rushed seaward, and there gathering density and strength, assumed the shape of a terrific funnel, an inky spiral, its gyrating sides streaked with intermittent flashes. Its volcanic roaring and rapid return to land was a signal for vain flight — the miserable lover knew it to be the flamboyant ether of the pyromaniac transformed into a trumpeting tornado. And he hoped that it would not spare him, as this phantasm twirled and ululated in the heavens, a grim portent of the iron wrath of the Almighty. In a twinkling it had passed

THE SPIRAL ROAD

him, high in the dome of heaven, only to erase
in a fabulous blast the moaning multitude. And
prone upon the strand between the stormy waters
and the field of muddy dead, Gerald Shannon
prayed for a second cataclysm which might
bring oblivion to him alone.

VI

A MOCK SUN

Where are the sins of yester-year?

I

THE grating of the carriage wheels awoke her from the dream which had lightly brushed away the night and the vision of the Arc de Triomphe—looming into the mystery of sky and stars, its monumental flanks sprawling across the Place de l'Étoile. She heard her name called by Mrs. Sheldam as their coachman guided his horses through the gateway of the Princesse de Lancovani's palace.

"Now, Ermentrude! Wake up, dear; we are there," said Mrs. Sheldam, in her kind, drawling tones. Mr. Sheldam sighed and threw away the unlighted cigar he had bitten during the ride along the Champs Élysées. Whatever the evening meant for his wife and niece, he saw little entertainment in store for himself; he did not speak French very well, he disliked music and "tall talk"; all together he wished himself at the Grand Hôtel, where he would be sure to meet some jolly Americans. Their carriage had

A MOCK SUN

halted in front of a spacious marble stairway, lined on either side with palms, and though it was a June night, the glass doors were closed.

Ermentrude's heart was in her throat, not because of the splendour, to which she was accustomed; but it was to be her first meeting with a noble dame, whose name was historic, at whose feet the poets of the Second Empire had prostrated themselves, passionately plucking their lyres; the friend of Liszt, Wagner, Berlioz, of Manet, Degas, Monet; the new school — this wonderful old woman knew them all, from Goncourt and Flaubert to Daudet and Maupassant. Had she not, Ermentrude remembered as she divested herself of her cloak, sent a famous romancer out of the house because he spoke slightlyingly of the Pope? Had she not cut the emperor dead when she saw him with a lady not his empress? What a night this would be in the American girl's orderly existence! And *he* was to be there, he had promised the princess.

Her heart was overflowing when she was graciously received by the great lady who stood in the centre of a group at the back of the drawing-room — a lofty apartment in white and gold, the panels painted by Baudry, the furniture purest Empire. She noted the height and majestic bearing of this cousin of kings, noted the aquiline nose drooped over a contracted mouth — which could assume most winning curves, withal shaded by suspicious down, that echoed

VISIONARIES

in hue her inky eyebrows. The eyes of the princess were small and green and her glance penetrating. Her white hair rolled imperially from a high, narrow forehead.

Ermentrude bore herself with the utmost composure. She adored the Old World, adored genius, but after all she was an Adams of New Hampshire, her sister the wife of a former ambassador. It was more curiosity than *gaucherie* that prompted her to hold the hand offered her and scrutinize the features as if to evoke from the significant, etched wrinkles the tremendous past of this hostess. The princess was pleased.

"Ah, Miss Adams," she said, in idiomatic English, "you have candid eyes. You make me feel like telling stories when you gaze at me so appealingly. Don't be shocked"—the girl had coloured—"perhaps I shall, after a while."

Mr. Sheldam had slipped into a corner behind a very broad table and under the shaded lamps examined some engravings. Mrs. Sheldam talked in hesitating French to the Marquis de Potachre, an old fellow of venerable and burlesque appearance. His fierce little white mustaches were curled ceilingward, but his voice was as timid as honey. He flourished his wizened hand toward Miss Adams.

"Charming! Delightful! She has something English in her *insouciant* pose, and is wholly American in her cerebral quality. And

A MOCK SUN

what colouring, what gorgeous brown hair! What a race, madame, is yours!"

Mrs. Sheldam began to explain that the Adams stock was famous, but the marquis did not heed her. He peered at her niece through a gold-rimmed monocle. The princess had left the group near the table and with two young men slowly moved down the salon. Miss Adams was immediately surrounded by some antiquated gentlemen wearing orders, who paid her compliments in the manner of the eighteenth century. She answered them with composure, for she was sure of her French, sure of herself—the princess had not annihilated her. Her aunt, accompanied by the marquis, crossed to her, and the old nobleman amused her with his saturnine remarks.

"Time was," he said, "when one met here the cream of Parisian wit and fashion: the great Flaubert, a noisy fellow at times, I vow; Dumas *filz*; Cabanel, Gérôme, Duran; ever-winning Carolus—ah, what men! Now we get Polish pianists, crazy Belgians, anarchistic poets, and Neo-impressionists. I have warned the princess again and again."

"*Bécasse!*" interrupted the lady herself. "Monsieur Rajewski has consented to play a Chopin nocturne. And here are my two painters, Miss Adams—Messieurs Bla and Maugre. They hate each other like the Jesuits and Jansenists of the good old days of Pascal."

"She likes to display her learning," grumbled

VISIONARIES

the marquis to Mrs. Sheldam. "That younger man, Bla, swears by divided tones; his neighbour, Maugre, paints in dots. One is always to be recognized a half-mile away by his vibrating waterscapes—he calls them *Symphonies of the Wet*; the other goes in for turkeys in the grass, fowls that are cobalt-blue daubs, with grass a scarlet. It's awful on the optic nerves. *Pontillisme*, Maugre names his stuff. Now, give me Corot—"

"Hush, hush!" came in energetic sibilants from the princess, who rapped with her Japanese walking-stick for silence. Mr. Sheldam woke up and fumbled the pictures as Rajewski, slowly bending his gold-dust aureole until it almost grazed the keyboard, began with deliberate accents a nocturne. Miss Adams knew his playing well, but its poetry was not for her this evening; rather did the veiled tones of the instrument form a misty background to the human tableau. So must Chopin have woven his magic last century, and in a salon like this—the wax candles burning with majestic steadiness in the sculptured sconces; the huge fireplace, monumental in design, with its dull brass garnishing; the subdued richness of the decoration into which fitted, as figures in a frame, the various guests. Even the waxed floor seemed to take on new reverberations as the pianoforte sounded the sweet despair of the Pole. To her dismay Ermentrude caught herself drifting away from the moment's hazy charm to thoughts of her poet. It annoyed

A MOCK SUN

her, she sharply reminded herself, that she could not absolutely saturate herself with the music and the manifold souvenirs of the old hôtel; perhaps this may have been the spell of Rajewski's playing. . . .

The music ceased. A dry voice whispered in her ear:—

"Great artist, that chap Rajewski. Had to leave Russia once because he wouldn't play the Russian national hymn for the Czar. Bless me, but he was almost sent to Siberia—and in irons too. Told me here in this very room that he was much frightened. They lighted fires in Poland to honour his patriotism. He acknowledged that *he* would have played twenty national hymns, but he couldn't remember the Russian one, or never knew it—anyhow, he was christened a patriot, and all by a slip of the memory. Now, that's luck, isn't it?"

She began to dislike this cynical old man with his depreciating tales of genius. She knew that her idols often tottered on clay feet, but she hated to be reminded of that disagreeable reality. She went to Monsieur Rajewski and thanked him prettily in her cool new voice, and again the princess nodded approval.

"She is *chic*, your little girl," she confided in her deep tones to Mrs. Sheldam, whose tired New England face almost beamed at the compliment.

"We were in Hamburg at the Zoölogical Garden; I always go to see animals," declaimed the princess, in the midst of a thick

VISIONARIES

silence. "For you know, my friends, one studies humanity there in the raw. Well, I dragged our party to the large monkey cage, and we enjoyed ourselves—immensely! And what do you think we saw! A genuine novelty. Some mischievous sailor had given an overgrown ape a mirror, and the poor wretch spent its time staring at its image, neglecting its food and snarling at its companions. The beast would catch the reflection of another ape in the glass and quickly bound to a more remote perch. The keeper told me that for a week his charge had barely eaten. It slept with the mirror held tightly in its paws. Now, what did the mirror mean to the animal! I believe"—here she became very vivacious—"I really believe that it was developing self-consciousness, and in time it would become human. On our way back from Heligoland, where we were entertained on the emperor's yacht at the naval manoeuvres, we paid another visit to our monkey house. The poor, misguided brute had died of starvation. It had become so vain, so egotistical, so superior, that it refused food and wasted away in a corner, gazing at itself, a hairy Narcissus, or rather the perfect type of your modern Superman, who contemplates his ego until his brain sickens and he dies quite mad."

Every one laughed. Mrs. Sheldam wondered what a Superman was, and Ermentrude felt annoyed. Zarathustra was another of her gods, and this brusquely related anecdote did not seem

A MOCK SUN

to her very spirituelle. But she had not formulated an answer when she heard a name announced, a name that set her heart beating. At last! The poet had kept his word. She was to meet in the flesh the man whose too few books were her bibles of art, of philosophy, of all that stood for aspiration toward a lovely ideal in a dull, matter-of-fact world.

"Now," said the princess, as if smiling at some hidden joke, "now you will meet *my* Superman." And she led the young American girl to Octave Kéroulan and his wife, and, after greeting them in her masculine manner, she burst forth :—

"Dear poet! here is one of your adorers from overseas. Guard your husband well, Madame Lys."

So he was married. Well, that was not such a shocking fact. Nor was Madame Kéroulan either—a very tall, slim, English-looking blonde, who dressed modishly and evidently knew that she was the wife of a famous man. Ermentrude found her insipid; she had studied her face first before comparing the mental photograph of the poet with the original. Nor did she feel, with unconscious sex rivalry, any sense of inferiority to the wife of her admired one. He was nearly forty, but he looked older; gray hairs tinged his finely modelled head. His face was shaven, and with the bulging brow and full jaw he was more of the German or Belgian than French. Black hair thrown off his broad forehead ac-

VISIONARIES

cented this resemblance; a composer rather than a prose-poet and dramatist, was the rapid verdict of Ermentrude. She was not disappointed, though she had expected a more fragile type. The weaver of moonshine, of mystic phrases, of sweet gestures and veiled sonorities should not have worn the guise of one who ate three meals a day and slept soundly after his mellow incantations. Yet she was not — inheriting, as she did, a modicum of sense from her father — disappointed.

The conversation did not move more briskly with the entrance of the Kéroulans. The marquis sullenly gossiped with Mr. Sheldam; the princess withdrew herself to the far end of the room with her two painters. Rajewski was going to a *soirée*, he informed them, where he would play before a new picture by Carrière, as it was slowly undraped; no one less in rank than a duchess would be present! A little stiffly, Ermentrude Adams assured the Kéroulans of her pleasure in meeting them. The poet took it as a matter of course, simply, without a suspicion of posed grandeur. Ermentrude saw this with satisfaction. If he had clay feet, — and he must have them; all men do, — at least he wore his genius with a sense of its responsibility. She held tightly her hands and leaned back, awaiting the precious moment when the oracle would speak, when this modern magician of art would display his cunning. But he was fatuously commonplace in his remarks.

A MOCK SUN

"I have often told Madame Kéroulan that my successes in Europe do not appeal to me as those in far-away America. Dear America — how it must enjoy a breath of real literature!"

Mrs. Sheldam sat up primly, and Ermentrude was vastly amused. With a flash of fun she replied : —

"Yes, America does, Monsieur Kéroulan. We have so many Europeans over there now that our standard has fallen off from the days of Emerson and Whitman. And didn't America give Europe Poe?" She knew that this boast had the ring of the amateur, but it pleased her to see how it startled him.

"America is the Great Bribe," he pursued.
"You have no artists in New York."

"Nor have we New Yorkers," the girl retorted.
"The original writing natives live in Europe."

He looked puzzled, but did not stop. "You have depressed literature to the point of publication," he solemnly asserted. This was too much and she laughed in mockery. Husband and wife joined her, while Mrs. Sheldam trembled at the audacity of her niece — whose irony was as much lost on her as it was on the poet.

"But *you* publish plays and books, do you not?" Ermentrude naïvely asked.

Madame Kéroulan interposed in icy tones : —

"Mademoiselle Adams misunderstands. Monsieur Kéroulan is the Grand Disdainer. Like his bosom friend, Monsieur Mallarmé, he cares little for the Philistine public —"

VISIONARIES

He interrupted her: "Lys, dear friend, you must not bore Miss Adams with my theories of art and life. *She* has read me—"

Ermentrude gave him a grateful glance. He seemed, despite his self-consciousness, a great man — how great she could not exactly define. His eyes — two black diamonds full of golden reflections, the eyes of a conqueror, a seer — began to burn little bright spots into her consciousness, and, selfishly, she admitted, she wished the two women would go away and leave her to interrogate her idol in peace. There were so many things to ask him, so many difficult passages in *The Golden Glaze* and *Hesitations*, above all in that great dramatic poem, *The Voices*, which she had witnessed in Paris, with its mystic atmosphere of pity and terror. She would never forget her complex feelings, when at a Paris theatre, she saw slowly file before her in a Dream-Masque the wraith-like figures of the poet, their voices their only corporeal gift. Picture had dissolved into picture, and in the vapours of these crooning enchantments she heard voices of various timbres enunciating in monosyllables the wisdom of the ages, the poetry of the future. This play was, for her, and for Paris, too, the last word in dramatic art, the supreme *nuance* of beauty. Everything had been accomplished: Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen; yet here was a new evocation, a fresh peep at untrodden paths. In bliss that almost dissolved her being, the

A MOCK SUN

emotional American girl reached her hotel, where she tried to sleep. When her aunt told her of the invitation tendered by the princess, a rare one socially, she was in the ninth heaven of the Swedenborgians. Any place to meet Octave Kéroulan!

And now he sat near her signalling, she knew, her sympathies, and as the fates would have it two dragons, her aunt and his wife, guarded the gateway to the precious garden of his imagination. She could have cried aloud her chagrin. Such an inestimable treasure was genius that to see it under lock and key invited indignation. The time was running on, and her great man had said nothing. He could, if he wished, give her a million extraordinary glimpses of the earth and the air and the waters below them, for his eyes were mirrors of his marvellous and many-coloured soul; but what chance had he with a conjugal iceberg on one side, a cloud of smoke—poor Aunt Sheldam—on the other! She felt in her fine, rhapsodic way like a young priestess before the altar, ready to touch with a live coal the lips of the gods, but withheld by a malignant power. For the first time in her life Ermentrude Adams, delicately nurtured in a social hothouse, realized in wrath the major tyranny of caste.

The evening wore away. Mrs. Sheldam aroused her husband as she cast a horrified glance at the classic prints he had been studying. The princess dismissed her two impres-

VISIONARIES

sionists and came over to the poet. She, too plainly, did not care for his wife, and as the party broke up there was a sense of relief, though Ermentrude could not conceal her dissatisfaction. Her joy was sincere when Madame Kéroulan asked Miss Adams and her aunt to call. It was slightly gelid, the invitation, though accepted immediately by Ermentrude. The *convenances* could look out for themselves; she would not go back to America without an interview. The princess raised her hand mockingly.

"What, I go to one of your conferences! Not I, *cher poète*. Keep your mysteries for your youthful disciples." She looked at Ermentrude, who did not lower her eyes—she was triumphant now. Perhaps he might say something before they parted. He did not, but the princess did.

"Beware, young America, of my Superman! You remember the story of the ape with the mirror!"

Ermentrude flushed with mortification. This princess was decidedly rude at times. But she kept her temper and thanked the lady for a unique evening. Her exquisite youth and grace pleased the terrible old woman, who then varied her warning.

"Beware," she called out in comical accents as they slowly descended the naked marble staircase, "of the Sleeping Princess!"

The American girl looked over her shoulder.

A MOCK SUN

"I don't think your Superman has a mirror at all."

"Yes, but his princess holds one for him!" was the jesting reply.

The carriage door slammed. They rolled homeward, and Ermentrude suffered from a desperate sense of the unachieved. The princess had been impertinent, the Kéroulans rather banal. Mrs. Sheldam watched her charge's face in the intermittent lights of the Rue de Rivoli.

"I think your poet a bore," she essayed. Then she shook her husband — they had reached their hôtel.

II

It was the garden of a poet, she declared, as, with the Kéroulans and her aunt, Ermentrude sat and slowly fanned herself, watching the Bois de Boulogne, which foamed like a cascade of green opposite this pretty little house in Neuilly. The day was warm and the drive, despite the shaded, watered avenues, a dusty, fatiguing one. Mrs. Sheldam had, doubtfully, it is true, suggested the bourgeois comfort of the Métropolitain, but she was frowned on by her enthusiastic niece. What! ride underground in such weather? So they arrived at the poet's not in the best of humour, for Mrs. Sheldam had quietly chidden her charge on the score of her "flightiness." These foreign celebrities were well enough in their way, but — !

VISIONARIES

And now Ermentrude, instead of looking Octave Kéroulan in the face, preferred the vista of the pale blue sky, awash with a scattered, fleecy white cloud, the rolling edges of which echoed the dazzling sunshine. The garden was not large, its few trees were of ample girth, and their shadows most satisfying to eyes weary of the city's bright, hard surfaces. There were no sentimental plaster casts to disturb the soft harmonies of this walled-in retreat, and if Ermentrude preferred to regard with obstinacy unusual in her mobile temperament the picture of Paris below them, it was because she felt that Kéroulan was literally staring at her.

A few moments after their arrival and with the advent of tea, he had accomplished what she had fervently wished for the night she had met him—he succeeded, by several easy moves, in isolating her from her aunt, and, notwithstanding her admiration, her desire to tap with her knuckles the metal of her idol and listen for a ring of hollowness, she was alarmed. Yet, perversely, she knew that he would not exhibit his paces before his wife—naturally a disinterested spectator—or before her aunt, who was hardly “intimate” enough. The long-desired hour found her disquieted. She did not have many moments to analyze these mixed emotions, for he spoke, and his voice was agreeably modulated.

“You, indeed, honour the poor poet's abode with your youth and your responsive soul, Miss

A MOCK SUN

Adams. I thank you, though my gratitude will seem as poor as my hospitality." She looked at him now, a little fluttered. "You bring to me across seas the homage of a fresh nation, a fresh nature." She beat a mental retreat at these calm, confident phrases; what could he know of her homage? "And if Amiel has said, 'Un paysage est un état de l'âme,' I may amend it by calling *my* soul a state of landscape, since it has been visited by your image." This was more reassuring, if exuberant.

"Man is mere inert matter when born, but his soul is his own work. Hence, I assert: the Creator of man is—man." Now she felt at ease. This wisdom, hewn from the vast quarry of his genius, she had encountered before in his Golden Glaze, that book which had built temples of worship in America wherein men and women sought and found the pabulum for living beautifully. He was "talking" his book. Why not? It was certainly delightful plagiarism!

"You know, dear young lady," he continued, and his eyes, with their contracting and expanding disks, held her attention like a clear flame, "do you know that my plays, my books, are but the drama of my conscience exteriorized? Out of the reservoirs of my soul I draw my inspiration. I have an æsthetic horror of evidence; like Renan, I loathe the deadly heresy of affirmation; I have the certitude of doubt, for are we poets not the lovers of the truth decorated?

VISIONARIES

When I built my lordly palace of art, it was not with the ugly durability of marble. No; like the Mohammedan who constructed his mosque and mingled with the cement sweet-smelling musk, so I dreamed my mosque into existence with music wedded to philosophy. Music and philosophy are the twin edges of my sword. Ah! you smile and ask, Where is Woman in this sanctuary? She is not barred, I assure you. My music—is Woman. Beauty is a promise of happiness, Stendhal says. I go further: Life—the woman one has; Art—the woman one loves!"

She was startled. Her aunt and Madame Kéroulan had retired to the end of the garden, and only a big bee, brumming overhead, was near. He had arisen with the pontifical air of a man who has a weighty gospel to expound. He encircled with his potent personality the imagination of his listener; the hypnotic quality of his written word was carried leagues farther in effect by his trained, soothing voice. Flattered, no longer frightened, her nerves deliciously assaulted by this coloured rhetoric, Ermentrude yielded her intellectual assent. She did not comprehend. She felt only the rhythms of his speech, as sound swallowed sense. He held her captive with a pause, and his eloquent eyes—they were of an extraordinary lustre—completed the subjugation of her will.

"Only kissed hands are white," he murmured,

A MOCK SUN

and suddenly she felt a velvety kiss on her left hand. Ermentrude did not pretend to follow the words of her aunt and Madame Kéroulan as they stopped before a bed of June roses. Nor did she remember how she reached the pair. The one vivid reality of her life was the cruel act of her idol. She was not conscious of blushing, nor did she feel that she had grown pale. His wife treated her with impartial indifference, at times a smile crossing her face, with its implication — to Ermentrude — of selfish reserves. But this hateful smile cut her to the soul — one more prisoner at his chariot wheels, it proclaimed! Kéroulan was as unconcerned as if he had written a poetic line. He had expected more of an outburst, more of a rebuff; the absolute snapping of the web he had spun surprised him. His choicest music had been spread for the eternal banquet, but the invited one tarried. Very well! If not to-day, to-morrow! He repeated a verse of Verlaine, and with his wife dutifully at his side bowed to the two Americans and told them of the pleasure experienced. Ermentrude, her candid eyes now reproachful and suspicious, did not flinch as she took his hand — it seemed to melt in hers — but her farewell was conventional. In the street, before they seated themselves in their carriage, Mrs. Sheldam shook her head.

"Oh, my dear! What a woman! What a man! I have *such* a story to tell you. No wonder you admire these people. The wife is

VISIONARIES

a genius — isn't she handsome? — but the man — he is an angel!"

"I didn't see his wings, auntie," was the curt reply.

III

The Sheldams always stayed at the same hôtel during their annual visits to Paris. It was an old-fashioned house with an entrance in the Rue Saint-Honoré and another in the Rue de Rivoli. The girl sat on a small balcony from which she could view the Tuileries Gardens without turning her head; while looking farther westward she saw the Place de la Concorde, its windy spaces a chessboard for rapid vehicles, whose wheels, wet from the watered streets, ground out silvery fire in the sun-rays of this gay June afternoon. Where the Avenue des Champs Élysées began, a powdery haze enveloped the equipages, overblown with their summer toilets, all speeding to Longchamps. It was racing day, and Ermentrude, feigning a headache, had insisted that her uncle and aunt go to the meeting. It would amuse them, she knew, and she wished to be alone. Nearly a week had passed since the visit to Neuilly, and she had been afraid to ask her aunt what Madame Kéroulan had imparted to her—afraid and also too proud. Her sensibility had been grievously wounded by the plainly expressed feelings of Octave Kéroulan. She had re-

A MOCK SUN

viewed without prejudice his behaviour, and she could not set down to mere Latin gallantry either his words or his action. No, there was too much intensity in both,—ah, how she rebelled at the brutal disillusionment! — and there were, she argued, method and sequence in his approach and attack. If she had been the average coquetting creature, the offence might not have been so mortal. But, so she told herself again and again,— as if to frighten away lurking darker thoughts, ready to spring out and devour her good resolutions,— she had worshipped her idol with reservations. His poetry, his philosophy, were so inextricably blended that they smote her nerves like the impact of some bright perfume, some sharp chord of modern music. Dangerously she had filed at her emotions in the service of culture and she was now paying the penalty for her ardent confidence. His ideas, vocal with golden meanings, were never meant to be translated into the vernacular of life, never to be transposed from higher to lower levels; this base betrayal of his ideals she felt Kéroulan had committed. Had he not said that love should be like “un baiser sur un miroir”? Was he, after all, what the princess had called him? And was he only a mock sun swimming in a firmament of glories which he could have outshone?

A servant knocked and, not receiving a response, entered with a letter. The superscription was strange. She opened and read :—

VISIONARIES

DEAR AND TENDER CHILD : I know you were angry with me when we parted. I am awaiting here below your answer to come to you and bare my heart. Say yes !

" Is the gentleman downstairs ? " she asked. The servant bowed. The blood in her head buzzing, she nodded, and the man disappeared. Standing there in the bright summer light, Ermentrude Adams saw her face in the oval glass, above the fireplace, saw its pallor, the strained expression of the eyes, and like a drowning person she made a swift inventory of her life, and, with the insane hope of one about to be swallowed up by the waters, she grasped at a solitary straw. Let him come ; she would have an explanation from him ! The torture of doubt might then be brought to an end. . . .

Some one glided into the apartment. Turning quickly, Ermentrude recognized Madame Kéroulan. Before she could orient herself that lady took her by both hands, and uttering apologetic words, forced the amazed girl into a chair.

" Don't be frightened, dear young lady. I am not here to judge, but to explain. Yes, I know my husband loves you. But do not believe in him. He is a *terrific* man." This word she emphasized as if doubtful of its meaning. " Ah, if you but knew the inferno of my existence ! There are so many like you—stop, do not leave ! You are not to blame. I, Lillias Kéroulan, do not censure your action. My hus-

A MOCK SUN

band is an evil man and a charlatan. Hear me out! He has only the gift of words. He steals all his profundities of art from dead philosophers. He is not a genuine poet. He is not a dramatist. I swear to you that he is now the butt of artistic Paris. The Princesse de Lancovani made him—she is another of his sort. He *was* the mode; now he is desperate because his day has passed. He knows you are rich. He desires your money, not *you*. I discovered that he was coming here this day. Oh, I am cleverer than he. I followed. Here I am to save you from him—and from yourself—he is not now below in the salon."

"Please go away!" indignantly answered Ermentrude. She was furious at this horrible, plain-spoken, jealous creature. Save her from herself—as if ever she had wavered! The disinterested adoration she had entertained for the great artist—what a hideous ending was this! The tall, blond woman with the narrow, light blue eyes watched the girl. How could any one call her handsome, Ermentrude wondered! Then her visitor noticed the crumpled letter on the table. With a gesture of triumph she secured it and smiling her superior smile she left, closing the door softly behind her.

Only kissed hands are white! Ermentrude threw herself on the couch, her cheeks burning, her heart tugging in her bosom like a ship impatient at its anchorage. And was this the sordid end of a beautiful dream? . . .

VISIONARIES

"Do you know, dearest, we have had such news!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheldam as she entered, and so charged with her happiness that she did not notice the drawn features of her niece. "Charlie, Charlie will be here some time next week. He arrives at Havre. He has just cabled his father. Let us go down to meet the boy." Charlie was the only son of the Sheldams and fonder of his cousin than she dare tell herself. She burst into tears, which greatly pleased her aunt.

In the train, eight days later, Ermentrude sat speechless in company with her aunt and uncle. But as the train approached Havre she remembered something.

"Aunt Clara," she bravely asked, "do you recall the afternoon we spent at the Kéroulans' ? What did Madame Kéroulan tell you then? Is it a secret?" She held tightly clenched in her hand the arm-rest at the side of the compartment.

"Oh, dear, no! The madame was very chatty, very communicative. It's funny I've not told you before. She confessed that she was the happiest woman on earth ; not only was she married to a grand genius,—for the life of me I can't see where *that* comes in!—but he was a good man into the bargain. It appears that his life is made weary by women who pester him with their attentions. Even our princess—yes, *the* princess ; isn't it shocking?—was a perfect nuisance until Mr. Kéroulan assured her that, though he owed

A MOCK SUN

much of his success in the world to her, yet he would never betray the trust reposed in him by his wife. What's the matter, dear, does the motion of the car affect you? It *does* rock! And *he* shows her all the letters he gets from silly women admirers—oh, these foreign women and their queer ways! And he tells her the way they make up to him when he meets them in society."

Ermentrude shivered. The princess also! And with all her warning about the Superman! Now she understood. Then she took the hand of Mrs. Sheldam, and, stroking it, whispered:—

"Auntie, I'm so glad I am going to Havre, going to see Charlie soon." The lids of her eyes were wet. Mrs. Sheldam had never been so motherly.

"You *are* a darling!" she answered, as she squeezed Ermentrude's arm. "But there is some one who doesn't seem to care much for Havre." She pointed out Mr. Sheldam, who, oblivious of picturesque Normandy through which the train was speeding, slept serenely. Ermentrude envied him his repose. He had never stared into the maddening mirror which turned poets into Supermen and—sometimes monsters. Had she herself not gazed into this distorting glass? The tune of her life had never sounded so discouragingly faint and inutile. Perhaps she did not possess the higher qualities that could extort from a nature so rich and

VISIONARIES

various as Octave Kéroulan's its noblest music! Perhaps his wife had told the truth to Mrs. Sheldam and had lied to her! And then, through a merciful mist of tears, Ermentrude saw Havre, saw her future.

VII

ANTICHRIST

To wring from man's tongue the denial of his existence
is proof of Satan's greatest power. — PÈRE RAVIGNAN.

THE most learned man and the most lovable it has been my good fortune to know is Monsignor Anatole O'Bourke—alas ! I should write, was, for his noble soul is gathered to God. I met him in Paris, when I was a music student. He sat next to me at a Pasdeloup concert in the Cirque d'Hiver, how many years ago I do not care to say. A casual exclamation betrayed my nationality, and during the intermission we drifted into easy conversation. Within five minutes he held me enthralled, did this big-souled, large-brained Irishman from the County Tipperary. We discussed the programme—a new symphonic poem by Rimski-Korsakoff, Sadko, had been alternately hissed and cheered—and I soon learned that my companion mourned a French mother and rejoiced in the loving presence of a very Celtic father. From the former he must have inherited his vigorous, logical intellect; the latter had evidently endowed him with a robust, jovial temperament, coupled with a wonderful perception of things mystical.

VISIONARIES

After the concert we walked slowly along the line of the boulevards. It was early May, and the wheel of green which we traversed, together with the brilliant picture made by the crowds, put us both in a happy temper. It was not long before Monsignor heard the confession of my ideals. He smiled quickly when I raved of music, but the moment I drifted into the theme of mysticism — the transposition is ever an easy one — I saw his interest leap to meet mine.

"So, you have read St. John of the Cross?" I nodded my head.

"And St. Teresa, that marvellous woman? The Americans puzzle me," he continued. "You are the most practical people on the globe and yet the most idealistic. When I hear of a new religion, I am morally certain that it is evolved in America."

"A new religion!" I started. This phrase had often assailed me, both in print and in the depths of my imagination. He divined my thought — ah! he was a wonder-worker in the way he noted a passing *nuance*.

"When we wear out the old one, it will be time for a new religion," he blandly announced; "you Americans, because of your new mechanical inventions, fancy you have free entry into the domain of the spiritual. But come, my dear young friend. Here is my hôtel. Can't I invite you to dinner?" We had reached the Boulevard Malherbe and, as I was miles out of my course, I consented. The priest fascinated me

ANTICHRIST

with his erudition, which swam lightly on the crest of his talk. He was, so I discovered during the evening, particularly well versed in the mystical writers, in the writings of the Kabbalists and the books of the inspired Northman, Swedenborg. As we sat drinking our coffee at one of the little tables in the spacious courtyard, I revived the motive of a new religion.

“Monsignor, have you ever speculated on the possible appearance of a second Mahomet, a second Buddha? What if, from some Asiatic jungle, there sallied out upon Europe a terrible ape-god, a Mongolian with exotic eyes and the magnetism of a religious madman — ”

“You are speaking of Antichrist?” he calmly questioned.

“Antichrist! Do you really believe in the Devil’s Messiah?”

“Believe, man! why, I have *seen* him.”

I leaned back in my chair, wondering whether I should laugh or look solemn. He noted my indecision, and his eyes twinkled — they were the blue-gray of the Irish, the eyes of a seer or an amiable ironist.

“Listen! but first let us get some strong cigars. *Garçon!*” As we smoked our pana-telas he related this history:—

“You ask me if I believe in an Antichrist, thereby betraying your slender knowledge of the Scriptures — you will pardon the liberty! I may refer you not only to John’s Epistles, to

VISIONARIES

the revelations of the dreamer of Patmos, but to so many learned doctors of the faith that it would take a week merely to enumerate the titles of their works all bearing on the mysterious subject. Our Holy Mother the Church has held aloof from any doctrinal pronouncements. The Antichrist has been predicted for the past thousand years. I recall as a boy poring over the map of the world which a friend of my mother had left with her. This lady my father called 'the angel with the moulted wings,' because she was always in an ecstatic tremor over the second coming of the Messiah. She would go to the housetop at least once every six months, and there, with a band of pious deluded geese dressed in white flowing robes, would inspect the firmament for favourable signs. Nothing ever happened, as we know, yet the predictions sown about the borders of that strange-looking chart have in a measure come true.

"There were the grimmest and most resounding quotations from the Apocalypse. 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen!' hummed in my ears for many a day. And the pale horse also haunted me. What would I have given to hear the music of that 'voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of great thunder.' I mean the 'harpers harping with their harps' the 'new song before the throne, before the four beasts and the elders.' It is recorded that 'no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty *and* four thousand, which were

ANTICHRIST

redeemed from the earth.' That is a goodly multitude. Let us hope we shall be of it. Learned Sir Thomas Browne asked what songs the sirens sang. I prefer to hear that wonderful 'harpèd' song.

"But I wander. The fault lies in that wondrous map of the world, with its pictured hordes of Russians sweeping down upon Europe and America like a plague of locusts, the wicked unbaptized Antichrist at the head of them, waving a cross held in reversed fashion. Don't ask me the meaning of this crazy symbolism. The sect to which my mother's friend belonged — God bless her, for she was a dear weak-minded lady — must have set great store by these signs. I admit that as a boy they scared me. Sitting here now, after forty years, I can still see those cryptograms. However, to my tale. About ten years ago I was in Paris, and in my capacity as Monsignor I had to attend a significant gathering at the embassy of the Russian ambassador in this city of light." He waved his left hand, from which I caught the purple fire of amethyst.

"It was a notable affair, and I don't mind telling you now that it was largely political. I had just returned from a secret mission at Rome, and I was forced to mingle with diplomatic people. Prince Wronsky was the representative of the Czar at that time in France, a charming man with a flavour of *diablerie* in his speech. He was a fervent Greek Catholic, like most of his countrymen, and it pleased him to fence mis-

VISIONARIES

chievously with me on the various dogmas of our respective faiths. He called himself *the Catholic*; I was only a Roman Catholic. I told him I was satisfied.

"On this particular night he was rather agitated when I made my salutations. He whispered to me that madame the princess had that very day presented him with a son and heir. Naturally I congratulated him. His restlessness increased as the evening wore on. At last he beckoned to me—we were very old friends—to follow him into his library. There he hesitated.

"'I want you to do me a favour, an odd one; but as you are known to me so long I venture to ask it. Do go upstairs and see my boy—' His tone was that of entreaty. I smiled.

"'Dear prince, I am, as a priest, hardly a judge of children. But if you wish it—is there anything wrong with the little chap's health?'

"'God forbid!' he ejaculated and piously crossed himself. We went to the first *étage* of his palace—he was gorgeously housed—and there he said:—

"'Madame is in another wing of our apartments—go in here—the child is attended by the nurse.' With that he pushed me through a swinging door and left me standing in a semi-lighted chamber. I was very near ill temper, I assure you, for my position was embarrassing. The room was large and heavily hung with tapestries. A nurse, a hag, a witch, a dark old

ANTICHRIST

gypsy creature, came over to me and asked me, in Russian :—

“‘Do you wish to see his Royal Highness the King of Earth and Heaven?’ Thinking she was some stupid *moujik’s* wife, I nodded my head seriously, though amused by the exalted titles. She put up a thin hand and I tiptoed to a cradle of gold and ivory—it certainly seemed so to my inexperienced eyes—the nurse parted the curtains, and there I saw—I saw—but my son, you will think I exaggerate—I saw the most exquisite baby in the universe. You laugh at an old bachelor’s rhapsody! In reality I don’t care much for children. But that child, that supreme morsel of humanity, was too much for me. I stood and stared and stood and stared, and all the while the tiny angel was smiling in my eyes, oh! such a celestial smile. From his large blue eyes, like flowers, he smiled into my very soul. I was chained to the floor as if by lead. Every fibre of my soul, heart, and brain went out to that little wanderer from the infinite. It was a pathetic face, full of suppressed sorrow—*Dieu!* but he was older than his father. I found my mind beginning to wander as if hypnotized. I tried to divert my gaze, but in vain. Some subtle emanation from this extraordinary child entered my being, and then, as if a curtain were being slowly lowered, a mist encompassed my soul; I was ceding, I felt, the immortal part of me to another, and all the time I was smiling at the baby and the baby

VISIONARIES

smiling back. I remember his long blond hair, parted in the middle and falling over his shoulders; but even that remarkable trait for an infant a few hours old did not puzzle me, for my sanity was surely being undermined by the persistent gaze of the boy. I vaguely recall passing my hand across my breast as if to stop the crevice through which my personality was filtering; I was certain that my soul was about to be stolen by that damnable child. Then the nurse dropped something, and my thoughts came back,—they were surely on the road to hell, for they were red and flaming when I got hold of them,—and the spell, or whatever it was, snapped.

"I looked up and noticed the woman maliciously smiling—if it had been in the days of the inquisition, I would have sent her to the faggots, for she was a hell-hag. The child had fallen back in his cradle as if the effort of holding my attention had exhausted him. Then it struck me that there was something unholy about this affair, and I resolutely strode to the crib and seized the baby.

"'What changeling is this?' I demanded in a loud voice, for the being that twisted in my grip was two or two hundred years old.

"'Lay him down, you monster!' clamoured the nurse, as I held the squirming bundle by both hands. It was a task—and I'm very strong. A superhuman strength waged against my muscles; but I was an old football half-back at the university, so I conquered the poor little devil.

ANTICHRIST

It moaned like a querulous old man ; the nurse, throwing her weight upon me, forced me to let go my hold. As I did so the baby turned on its face, its dainty robe split wide open, and to my horror I saw on its back, between its angelically white shoulders, burnt in as if by branding irons, the crucifix — and *upside down!*"

I shuddered. I knew. He lowered his voice and spoke in detached phrases.

" It was — oh ! that I live to say it — it was the dreaded Antichrist — yes, this Russian baby — it was predicted that he would be born in Russia — I trembled so that my robes waved in an invisible wind. The reversed cross — the mark of the beast — the sign by which we are to know the Human Satan — the last opponent of Christianity. I confess that I was discomposed at the sight of this little fiend, for it meant that the red star, the baleful star of the north, would rise in the black heavens and bloody war spread among the nations of the earth. It also meant that doomsday was not far off, and, good Christian as I believe myself to be, a shiver ran down my spine at the idea of Gabriel's trump and the resurrection of the dead. Yes, I shan't deny it — so material are the sons of men, I among them ! And the very thought of Judgment Day and its blasting horrors withered my heart. Still something had to be done, prophecy or no prophecy. To fulfil the letter of the law this infernal visitor was let loose from hell. There was one way, so I grasped — "

VISIONARIES

"Great God, Monsignor, you didn't strangle the demon?" I cried.

"No, no — something better. I rushed over to a marble wash-basin and seized a ewer of water, and, going back to the crib, despite the frantic remonstrances of the old sorceress, I baptized the Antichrist in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Before my eyes I saw the inverted cross vanish. Then I soundly spanked the presumptuous youngster and, running down the staircase, I sought the prince and said to him:—

"Your boy is now a Roman, not a Greek Catholic. We are quits!"

The idea of a spanked Antichrist disconsolately roaming the earth, unwilling to return to his fiery home for fear of a scolding, his guns of evil spiked, his virus innocuous, his mission of spiritual destruction a failure—for what could a baptized devil's child do but pray and repent? — all this dawned upon me, and I burst into laughter, the worthy Monsignor discreetly participating. His bizarre recital proved to me that, despite his Gallic first name, Monsignor Anatole O'Bourke hailed from the County Tipperary.

VIII

THE ETERNAL DUEL

What is the sorriest thing that enters Hell ?

—D. G. ROSSETTI, *Vain Virtues*.

THE face set him to a strange wondering ; he sat at the coffin and watched it. His wife's face it was, and above the sorrow of irrevocable parting floated the thought that she did not look happy as she lay in her bed of death. Monross had seen but two dead faces before, those of his father and mother. Both had worn upon the mask which death models an expression of relief. But this face, the face of his wife, of the woman with whom he had lived — how many years ! He asked himself why he shuddered when he looked down at it, shuddered and also flushed with indignation. Had she ever been happy ? How many times had she not voiced her feelings in the unequivocal language of love ! Yet she seemed so hideously unhappy as she stretched before him in her white robes of death. Why ? What secret was this disclosed at the twelfth hour of life, on the very brink of the grave ? Did death, then, hold the solution to the enigma of the conquering Sphinx !

Monross, master of psychology, tormented by

VISIONARIES

visions of perfection, a victim to the devouring illusion of the artist,—Monross asked himself with chagrin if he had missed the key in which had sounded the symphony of this woman's life. This woman! His wife! A female creature, long-haired, smiling, loquacious — though reticent enough when her real self should have flashed out signals of recognition at him — this wife, the Rhoda he had called day and night — what had she been?

She had understood him, had realized his nobility of ideal, his gifts, his occasional grandeur of soul, — like all artistic men he was desultory in the manifestation of his talent, — and had read aloud to him those poems written for another woman in the pitch-hot passion of his youth — before he had met her. To her he had been always, so he told himself, a cavalier in his devotion. Without wealth, he had kept the soles of her little feet from touching the sidewalks of life. Upon her dainty person he had draped lovely garments. Why then, he wondered, the vindictive expression etched, as if in aqua fortis, upon her carved features?

Some Old World superstition held him captive as he gazed. Death is the grand revealer, he thought; death alone stamps upon the crumbling canvas of mortality the truth. Rhoda was dead. Yet her face was alive for the first time. He saw its truth; and he shuddered, for he also discerned the hate that had lurked a life long in its devious and smiling expressions — expressions

THE ETERNAL DUEL

like a set of scenery pushed on and off as the order of the play demanded. Oh, the mystery of it all! He, Monross, poet, lover, egoist, husband, to be confronted by this damnable defiance, this early-born hate! What had he done! And in the brain cells of the man there awakened a processional fleet of pictures: Rhoda wooed; Rhoda dazzled; Rhoda won; Rhoda smiling before the altar; Rhoda resigned upon that other altar; Rhoda, wife, mother; and Rhoda—dead!

But Rhoda loved—again he looked at the face. The brow was virginally placid, the drooping, bitter mouth alone telling the unhappy husband a story he had never before suspected. Rhoda! Was it possible this tiny exquisite creature had harboured rancour in her soul for the man who had adored her because she had adored him? Rhoda! The shell of his egoism fell away from him. He saw the implacable resentment of this tender girl who, her married life long, had loathed the captain that had invaded the citadel of her soul, and conqueror-like had filched her virgin zone. The woman seemingly stared at the man through lids closed in death—the woman, the sex that ages ago had feared the barbarian who dragged her to his cave, where he subdued her, making her bake his bread and bear his children.

In a wide heaven of surmise Monross read the confirmation of his suspicions—of the eternal duel between the man and the woman; knew

VISIONARIES

that Rhoda hated him most when most she trembled at his master bidding. And now Rhoda lay dead in her lyre-shaped coffin, saying these ironic things to her husband, when it was too late for repentance, too early for eternity.

IX

THE ENCHANTED YODLER A MARIENBAD ELEGY

I

THE remorseless rain had washed anew the face of the dark blue sky that domed Marienbad and its curved chain of hills. Hugh Krayne threw open his window and, leaning out, exclaimed, as he eagerly inhaled the soft air of an early May morning :—

“At last! And high time!” For nine days he had waded through the wet streets, heavily leaping the raging gutters and stopping before the door of every optician to scrutinize the barometer. And there are many in this pretty Bohemian health resort, where bad weather means bad temper, with enforced confinement in dismal lodgings or stuffy *restaurations*, or — last resort of the bored — the promenade under the colonnade, while the band plays as human beings shuffle ponderously over the cold stones and stare at each other in sullen desperation.

But this day was a glorious one; in high spirits the Englishman left the house on the Oberkreuzbrunnenstrasse and moved slowly to-

VISIONARIES

ward the springs. He was not thirty, but looked much older, for his weight was excessive. An easy-going temperament, a good appetite, a well-filled purse, and a conscience that never disturbed his night's slumber contributed to this making of flesh. He waddled, despite his great height, and was sufficiently sensitive to enjoy Marienbad as much for its fat visitors as for its curative virtues. Here at least he was not remarkable, while in London or Paris people looked at him sourly when he occupied a stall at the theatre or a seat in a café. Not only had he elbow room in Marienbad, but he felt small, positively meagre, in comparison with the prize specimens he saw painfully progressing about the shaded walks or puffing like obese engines up the sloping roads to the Rübezahl, the Egerländer, the Panorama, or the distant Podhorn.

The park of the Kreuzbrunnen was crowded, though the hour of six had just been signalled from a dozen clocks in the vicinity. The crowd, gathered from the four quarters of the globe, was in holiday humour, as, glass in hand, it fell into line, until each received the water doled out by uniformed officials. Occasionally a dispute as to precedence would take place when the serpentine procession filed up the steps of the old-fashioned belvedere; but quarrels were as rare as a lean man. A fat crowd is always good-tempered, irritable as may be its individual members. Hugh Krayne kept in position, while two women shoved him about as

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

if he were a bale of hay. He heard them abusing him in Bohemian, a language of which he did not know more than a few words; their intonations told him that they heartily disliked his presence. Yet he could not give way; it would not have been Marienbad etiquette. At last he reached the spring and received his usual low bow from the man who turned the polished wheel—the fellow had an eye tuned for gratuities. With the water in his glass three-fourths cold and one-fourth warm, a small napkin in his left hand, the Englishman moved with the jaunty grace of a young elephant down the smooth terraced esplanade that has made Marienbad so celebrated. The sun was riding high, and the tender green of the trees, the flashing of the fountains, and the music of the band all caused Hugh to feel happy. He had lost nearly a pound since his arrival the week before, and he had three more weeks to stay. What might not happen!

Just where the promenade twists under the shaded alleys that lead to the Ferdinandsbrunnen, he saw four women holding hands. They were dressed in Tyrolean fashion—pleated skirts, short enough to show white, plump stockings, feet in slippers, upon the head huge caps, starched and balloony; their massive white necks, well exposed, were encircled by collars that came low on bodices elaborately embroidered. Behind them marched several burly chaps, in all the bravery of the Austrian Tyrol—

VISIONARIES

the green alpine hat, with the feather at the back, the short gray jacket, the bare knees, and the homespun stockings. Krayne regarded curiously this strolling band of singers. Their faces seemed familiar to him, and he rapidly recalled souvenirs of Salzburg and an open-air concert. But this morning there was something that arrested his attention in the group. It was a girl of eighteen or twenty, with a brilliant complexion, large blue eyes, and a robust, shapely figure. As she passed she gave him such an imploring look, such an appealing look, that all his chivalric instincts rushed into the field of his consciousness. He awkwardly dropped his tumbler. He turned around, half expecting to see the big child still looking at him. Instead he gazed upon the athletic backs of her male companions and to the unpleasant accompaniment of hearty feminine laughter. Were these women laughing at him? No fool like a fat one, he merrily thought, as he bought a new glass at a bazaar, which a grinning, monkey-faced creature sold him at the regular price redoubled.

Before his meagre breakfast of one egg and a dry rusk, Krayne endeavoured to evoke the features of the pretty creature who had so strongly attracted him. He saw a tangle of black hair, a glance that touched his heart with its pathos, a pair of soft, parted red lips, and dazzling teeth. It was an impression sufficiently powerful to keep him company all the forenoon. Fat men, he reasoned on the steep pass that conducts to

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

the Café Forstwarte, are always sentimental, by no means always amiable, and, as a rule, subject to sudden fancies. Ten years of his sentimental education had been sown with adventures that had begun well, caprices that had no satisfactory endings. He had fallen in love with the girl who played Chopin on the piano, the girl who played Mendelssohn on the violin, the girl who played Goltermann on the violoncello. Then followed girls who painted, poetized, botanized, and hammered metal. Once—an exception—he had succumbed to the charms of an actress who essayed characters in the dumps—Ibsen soubrettes, Strindberg servants, and Máxim Górkы tramps. Yet he had, somehow or other, emerged heart whole from his adventures among those masterpieces of the cosmos—women.

Certainly this might be another romance added to the long list of his sentimental fractures. He ate his dinner, the one satisfactory meal of the day allowed him by a cruel doctor, with the utmost deliberation. He had walked three hours during the morning, and now, under the spacious balconies of the Forstwarte, he knew that his beef and spinach would be none the worse for a small bottle of very dry, light Vöslauer. Besides, his physician had not actually forbidden him a little liquid at the midday meal. Just before bedtime he was entitled—so his dietetic schedule told him—to one glass of Pilsner beer. Not so bad, after all, this banting at Marienbad, he reflected. Anyhow, it was

VISIONARIES

better than the existence of those fellows at sea-shore and mountain, who gorged and guzzled their summer away. Then he tried to remember among his London club friends any who were as heavy as he, but he could not. Idly smoking, he regarded the piazzas, with their tables and groups of obese humanity, eating, drinking, and buzzing — little fat flies, he thought, as he drew his waistcoat in, feeling quite haughty and slender.

He read on a placard that the "Präger Bavarian Sextet" would give a "grand" concert at the Hotel Bellevue this very afternoon. "Ah ha!" said Krayne aloud, "that's the girl I saw!" Then he wasted several hours more loitering about the beautiful park on the Kaiserstrasse and looking in the shop windows at views of Marienbad on postal cards, at yellow-covered French, German, and Russian novels, at pictures of kings, queens, and actresses. He also visited the houses wherein Goethe, Chopin, and Wagner had dwelt. It was four o'clock when he entered the garden of the Bellevue establishment and secured a table. The waiter at his request removed the other chairs, so he had a nook to himself. Not a very large crowd was scattered around; visitors at Marienbad do not care to pay for their diversions. In a few minutes, after a march had been banged from a wretched piano — were pianos ever tuned on the Continent, he wondered? — the sextet appeared, looking as it did in the morning, and sang an Austrian melody, a capella. It was not very interesting.

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

The women stood in front and yelled with a hearty will; the men roared in the background. Krayne saw his young lady, holding her apron by the sides, her head thrown back, her mouth well opened; but he could not distinguish her individual voice. How pretty she was! He sipped his coffee. Then came a zither solo—that abominable instrument of plucked wires, with its quiver of a love-sick clock about to run down; this parody of an æolian harp always annoyed Krayne, and he was glad when the man finished. A stout soprano in a velvet bodice, her arms bare and brawny, the arms of a lass accustomed to ploughing and digging potatoes, sang something about turtle doves. She was odious. Odious, too, was her companion, in a duo through which they screamed and rumbled—“Verlassen bin i.” At last she came out and he saw by the programme that her name was Röselein Gich. What an odd name, what an attractive girl! He finished his coffee and frantically signalled his waitress. It was against the doctor’s orders to take more than one cup, and then the sugar! Hang the doctor, he cried, and drank a second cup.

She sang. Her voice was an unusually heavy, rich contralto. That she was not an accomplished artiste he knew. He did not haunt opera houses for naught, and, like all fat men who wear red ties in the forenoon, he was a trifle dogmatic in his criticism. The young woman had the making of an opera singer. What a Fricka, Brangaene, Ortrud, Sieglinde, Erda, this

VISIONARIES

clever girl might become! She was musical, she was dramatic in temperament—he let his imagination run away with him. She only sang an Oberbayerische yodel, and, while her voice was not very high, she contrived a falsetto that made her English listener shiver. This yodel seemed to him as thrilling as the "*Ho yo to ho!*" of Brunnhilde as she rushes over the rocky road to Valhalla. *La la liriti! La la lirita! Hallali!* chirped Röselein, with a final flourish that positively enthralled Hugh Krayne. He applauded, beating with his stick upon the table, his face flushed by emotion. Decidedly this girl was worth the visit to Marienbad.

And he noted with delight that Fräulein Gich had left the stage. Basket in hand, she went from table to table, selling pictures and programmes and collecting admission fees. At last he would be able to speak with the enchantress, for he prided himself on the purity of his German. Smiling until she reached his table, she suddenly became serious when she saw this big Englishman in the plaid suit and red necktie. Again he felt the imploring glance, the soft lips parted in childish supplication. It was too much for his nerves. He tossed into her basket a gold piece, grabbed at random some pictures, and as her beseeching expression deepened, her eyes moist with wonder and gratitude, he tugged at a ring on his corpulent finger, and, wrenching it free, presented it to her with a well-turned phrase, adding:—

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

"Thou hast the making of a great singer in thee, Fräulein Röselein. I wish I could help thee to fame!"

The girl gave him an incredulous stare, then reddening, the muscles on her full neck standing out, she ran like a hare back to her companions. Evidently he had made an impression. The honest folk about him who witnessed the little encounter fairly brimmed over with gossip. The stout basso moved slowly to Krayne, who braced himself for trouble. Now for it! he whispered to himself, and grasped his walking-stick firmly. But, hat in hand, his visitor, a handsome blond man, approached and thanked Hugh for his generosity. He was a lover of music, the yodler assured him, and his wife and himself felt grateful for the interest he displayed in Fräulein Röselein, his wife's sister. Yes, she had a remarkable voice. What a pity—but wouldn't the gentleman attend the concert to be given that evening up at the Café Alm? It was, to be sure, rather far, the café, but the moon would be up and if he could find his way there he might do the company the honour of coming back with them.

The Fräulein would sing a lot for him—Bohemian, Tyrolean, French, and German songs. Ah, she was versatile! The man did not speak like a peasant, and seemed a shrewd, pleasant fellow. Hugh Krayne, in excellent though formal German, assured the other of his pleasure and accepted the invitation. Then he looked

VISIONARIES

over at Röselein, who stood on the stage, and as he did so she waved a crimson handkerchief at him as a friendly sign. He took off his hat, touched significantly his own tie to indicate a reciprocity of sentiment, and all aglow he ordered a third cup of coffee.

The cure could take care of itself. *Man lebt nur einmal!*

II

On his way to the Alm he met the fattest man in Marienbad, a former chef of the German emperor, and gave him a friendly salute. He liked to see this monster, who made the scales groan at six hundred pounds, more than double his own weight, for it put him at ease with himself. But this evening he felt uncomfortable. What if he were to reach such a climax in adiposity! What if in the years to come he should be compelled, as was the unfortunate man from Berlin, to sit on a chair every five minutes, a chair carried by an impudent boy! What—here his heart sank—if the Fräulein should mock his size! He walked so rapidly at this idea that other victims of rotundity stopped to look at his tall figure and nodded approval. Ach! Marienbad was wonderful!

After he had found a seat at the Alm next to the low wall, across which he could see a vast stretch of undulating country, lighted by a moon that seemed to swing like a silver hoop in the

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

sky, Krayne ordered Pilsner. He was fatigued by the hilly scramble and he was thirsty. Oh, the lovely thirst of Marienbad — who that hath not been within thy hospitable gates he knoweth it not! The magic of the night was making of him a poet. He could see his Tyrolean friends behind the glass partition of the little hall. There would they sing, not in the open. It was nearly the same, for presently the windows were raised and their voices came floating out to him, the bourdon of Röselein's organ easily distinguishable. Love had sharpened his ears. He drained his glass and sent for another. He felt that he was tumbling down an abyss of passion and that nothing in the world could save him.

The intermission! He stood up to attract the attention of Herr Johan Präger. Röselein saw him and at once neared him, but without the basket. This delicacy pleased Krayne very much. It showed him that he was not on the same footing as the public. He made the girl take a seat, and though he felt the eyes of the crowd upon him, he was not in the least concerned. London was far away and the season was too young for the annual rush of his compatriots. Would the Fräulein take something? She accepted coffee, which she drank from a long glass with plenty of milk and sugar. She again gazed at him with such a resigned expression that he felt his starched cuffs grow warm from their contiguity to his leaping pulses.

"Yes, Fräulein," he said, employing the famil-

VISIONARIES

iar *du*, "thou hast overcome me. Why not accept my offer?" Was this the prudent Hugh Krayne talking? She smiled sweetly and shook her head. Her voice was delicious in colour and intonation, nor did it betray humble origin.

"I fear, dear sir, that what you offer is impossible. My sister, the soprano, would never hear of such a thing. My brother, her husband, would not allow it. And I owe them my living, my education. How could I repay them if I left them now?" she hesitated.

"Simply enough. You would be a singer at the opera some day, and take them all to live with you. Is there no other reason?" He recollects with a vivid sense of the disagreeable the lively antics of a lithe youth in the company, who, at the close of the concert, executed with diabolic dexterity what they called a *Schuhplattltanz*. This dance had glued Krayne's attention, for Röselein was the young tenor singer's partner. With their wooden sabots they clattered and sang, waving wildly their arms or else making frantic passages of pretended love and coquetry. It upset the Englishman to see the impudence of this common peasant fellow grasping Röselein by the waist, as he whirled her about in the boorish dance. Hence the clause to his question. She endured his inquiring gaze, as she simply answered:—

"No, there is no other reason." She put her hand on the arm of her companion and the lights suddenly became misty, for he was of an apo-

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

plectic tendency. They talked of music, of the opera in Vienna and Prague. She was born in Bavaria, not more than a day's ride from Marienbad. You could almost see her country from the top of the Podhornberg, in the direction of the Franconian Mountains, not far from Bayreuth. The place was called Schnabelwaid, and it was very high, very windy. Since her tenth year she had been singing — yes, even in the chorus at the Vienna opera, with her sister and brother. They were no common yodlers. They could sing all the music of the day. The yodling was part of their business, as was the costume. Later, when she had enough saved, she would study in Vienna for grand opera!

He was enraptured. How romantic it all was! A free-born maiden — he was certain she was reared in some old castle — wandering about earning money for her musical education. What a picture for a painter! What a story for a novelist! They were interrupted. The dancer, a young man with a heavy shock of hair growing low on his forehead, under which twinkled beady black eyes, had been sent to tell Fräulein Röselein that her colleagues were waiting for her. With a courtesy she went away. Krayne now thoroughly hated the dancer.

It was long after eleven when the concert was over and the party started on its homeward trip. Krayne and Röselein walked behind the others, and soon the darkness and the narrowness of the road forced him to tread after the girl. The

VISIONARIES

moon's rays at intervals pierced the foliage, making lacelike patches of light in the gloom. At times they skirted the edges of a circular clearing and saw the high pines fringing the southern horizon; overhead the heavens were almost black, except where great streams of stars swept in irregular bands. It was a glorious sight, Krayne told Röselein — too sublime to be distracted by mere mortal love-making, he mentally added. Nevertheless he was glad when they were again in the woods; he could barely distinguish the girl ahead of him, but her outline made his heart beat faster. Once, as they neared the town, he helped her down a declivity into the roadway, and he could not help squeezing her hand. The pressure was returned. He boldly placed her arm within his, and they at last reached the streets, but not before, panting with mingled fright and emotion, he solemnly kissed her. She did not appear surprised.

"Call me Rösie — thou!" she murmured, and her naïveté brought the ready tears to his eyes. They made a rendezvous for the next morning on the Promenade Platz. The only thing he did not like was the scowling face of the dancer when he said good night to the others under the electric lights of the Kreuzbrunnen. He was correct, then, in his premonition.

That night Hugh Krayne dreamed he was a very skeleton for thinness — not an unusual vision of fat men — and also a Tyrolean yodler, displaying himself before a huge audience of

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

gigantic human beings, who laughed so loudly that he could not open his lips to frame the familiar words of his song. In the despair of a frantic nightmare, his face streaming with anguished tears, he forced his voice :—

La, la, liriti! La, la, larita! Hallali! Then he awoke in triumph. Was he not a yodler?

III

He told her of his dream and strange ambition. She did not discourage him. It could be settled easily enough. Why not join the company and take a few lessons? "With such a teacher?" he had exclaimed, and his gesture was so impassioned that the promenaders, with their shining morning goblets of water, were arrested by the spectacle. Wonderful, wonderful Marienbad! was the general comment! But Krayne was past ridicule. He already saw Röselein his bride. He saw himself a yodler. The cure? Ay, there was the rub. He laid bare his heart. She aided him with her cool advice. She was very sensible. Her brother-in-law and her sister would welcome him in their household, for he was a lover of music and his intentions were honourable. Of course, he sighed, of course, and fingered his red tie. Why not, she argued, remain at Marienbad for three weeks more and complete his cure? Anyhow, he was not so stout! She looked up at him archly. Again he saw mist.

VISIONARIES

That settled it. For another three weeks he lived in a cloud of expectation, of severe training, long walks, dieting, and Turkish baths. No man worked harder. And he was rewarded by seeing his flesh melt away a pound or two daily. When the company returned after its itinerary in the neighbourhood Rösie was surprised to meet a man who did not weigh much over two hundred pounds, healthy, vigorous, and at least five years younger in appearance. She was very much touched. So was her sister. There was a family consultation, and despite the surly opposition of the dancer, Hugh Krayne was welcomed as a member of the Präger Bavarian Sextette company. Forgetting the future he had arranged for Rösie, he began his vocal lessons immediately.

In July he sang for the first time in public at Eger. He was extremely frightened, but as it was only a duo he managed fairly well. Then he sang at Tepl, this time alone. His voice broke badly in the yodel and he was jeered by a rude audience. He had grown very much thinner. His doctor warned him against continuing the waters, and advised rice, potatoes, and ale, but he did not listen. He now paid the bills of the company while travelling. Rösie had confessed with tears that they were fearfully poor. From that time he handed her his purse. He even placated the jealous dancer with a gold watch and a box of hair pomade. Ah! how he loathed the fellow's curly locks, his

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

greasy familiarities! Rösie told him this acrobat was necessary in the company until he could be replaced. Already Hugh—she called him “Ü”—could yodel better. Some day he might, when thinner, dance better. Perhaps—again that appealing glance, the corner of her lips faintly touched by the mysterious smile of a *Monna Lisa*. Krayne redoubled his arduous training, practised yodling in the forests, danced jigs on the pine-needles, and doubled his allowance of the waters.

They went to Carlsbad. He yodled. He was applauded. The dancer was in a fine rage. Although Krayne had asked Rösie to buy a first-class compartment on the railroad trip over and back, they went in a third-class car. Präger declared that it was good enough for him, and he didn't wish to spoil his troupe! His wife now held the purse-strings, as Rösie was too engrossed with her art and Hugh too absorbed in his love to notice such mere sublunary matters. The girl had promised nothing positive for the future. She kept him on the brittle edge of nervous expectation. The opposition of the dancer had been successfully met by threats of dismissal; Hugh continued to lose flesh and gain in vocal and pedal agility.

He danced for the first time at Königswart, not far from the château of the Metternichs. It was August. So great was the applause that the younger dancer was discharged. He left with muttered threats of vengeance. The next

VISIONARIES

day Krayne turned over all his business affairs to the able hand of Frau Präger; he lived only for Rösie and his art. . . .

September was at hand. The weather was so warm and clear, that the king of England deferred his departure for a few days. One afternoon, just before the leaves began to brown on the hills, there was a concert at the garden of the Hotel Bellevue. The royal party attended. The yodling was much praised, especially that of a good-looking young woman and her escort, a very tall man of cadaverous aspect, his shanks like the wooden stilts of the shepherds on the Bordeaux Landes. His face, preternaturally emaciated and fatigued, opened to emit an amazing yodel. When the *Schuhplattltanz* was reached he surprised the audience by an extraordinary exhibition. He threw his long legs about like billiard cues, while his arms flapped as do windmills in a hard gale. He was pointed out as a celebrity — once a monster Englishman, who had taken the *Kur*; who was in love, but so poor that he could not marry. The girl with him was certain to make a success in grand opera some day. Yes, Marienbad was proud of Krayne. He was one of her show sons, a witness to her curative powers. Proud also of the Bavarian Präger Sextette. Herr Präger was reputed a rich man. . . .

The night of that concert Marienbad saw the last of the Bavarian sextette, which at midnight, joined by its old dancer with the tenor voice,

THE ENCHANTED YODLER

left in a third-class carriage for Vienna. Hugh Krayne, not possessing enough to pay his passage, had not been invited; nor was he informed of the sudden departure until a day later. . . .

On the road to the Alm, of moonlight nights, toiling visitors catch glimpses of a human, almost a skeleton, dressed in rags, his head bare as his feet, about his neck a flaming crimson handkerchief. He is known to Marienbäders as "The Man Who Stayed Too Long." He never addresses passers-by; but as they lose sight of him they hear the woods resound with his elegiac howl:—

La la liriti! La la lirita! Hallali!

X

THE THIRD KINGDOM

I

A DOUBTER

BROTHER HYZLO sat in his cell and read. The gentle stillness of a rare spring morning enveloped him with its benison. And the clear light fell upon the large pages of a book in his hand,—the window through which it streamed was the one link between the young recluse and the life of the world. From it he could see the roofs of the city beneath him; when he so wished, he might, without straining his gaze, distinguish the Pantheon at the end of that triumphal avenue which spanned the Seine and had once evoked for him visions of antique splendour. But Brother Hyzlo no longer cared for mundane delights. His doubting soul was the battle-field over which he ranged day and night searching for diabolic opponents. Exterior existence had become for him a shadow; the only life worth living was that of the spirit.

In his book that fresh spring morning he read as if in the flare of a passing meteor these disquieting words :—

THE THIRD KINGDOM

“How were it if, some day or night, a demon stole after thee into thy most solitary solitude, and said to thee: ‘This life, as thou livest it now, and hast lived it, thou shalt have to live over again, and not once but innumerable times ; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every pleasure and every thought and sigh, and everything in thy life, the great and the unspeakably petty alike, must come again to thee, and all in the same series and succession ; this spider, too, and this moonlight betwixt the trees and this moment likewise and I myself. The eternal sand-glass of time is always turned again, and thou with it, thou atom of dust’? Wouldst thou not cast thyself down and with gnashing of teeth curse the demon who thus spoke? Or, hast thou ever experienced the tremendous moment in which thou wouldest answer him : ‘Thou art a god and never heard I anything more divine’? ”

The book slipped from his hands. “Why not?” he murmured, “why not? There is no such thing as chance. The law of probabilities is not a mere fancy, but an austere need. Matter is ever in evolution. Energy alone is indestructible. Radium has revealed this to us. In eternity when the Infinite throws the dice, double-sixes are sure to come up more than once. Miracles? But why miraculous? Infinity of necessity must repeat itself, and then I, sitting here now, will sit here again, sit and doubt the goodness of God, ay, doubt His

VISIONARIES

existence. . . . How horrible!" He paused in the whirl of his thoughts.

"Yet how beautiful, for if the eternal recurrence be truth, then must the great drama of the Redemption be repeated. Then will our foes be convinced of Christianity and its reality. But shall we be conscious in that far-off time of our anterior existence? Ah! hideous, coiling doubt. What a demon is this Nietzsche to set whirring in the brains of poor, suffering humanity such torturing questions! Better, far better for the world to live and not to think. Thought is a disease, a morbid secretion of the brain-cells. Ah! materialist that I am, I can no longer think without remembering the ideas of Cabanis, that gross atheist. Why am I punished so? What crimes have I committed in a previous existence — Karma, again! — that I must perforce study the writings of impious men? Yet I submitted myself as a candidate for the task, to save my brethren in Christ from soiling their hearts. Heaven preserve me from the blight of spiritual pride, but I believe that I am now a scapegoat for the offences of my fellow-monks, and, thus, may redeem my own wretched soul. Ah! Nietzsche — Antichrist."

He arose and threw the volume across his cell. Then going to the window regarded with humid gaze the world that sprawled below him in the voluptuous sunshine. But so sternly was the inner eye fixed on the things of the spirit that he soon turned away from the delectable

THE THIRD KINGDOM

picture, and as he did so his glance rested upon a crucifix. He started, his perturbed imagination again touched.

"What if Nietzsche were right? The first Christian, the only Christian, died on the cross, he has said. What an arraignment of our precious faith, Jesus Christ, our Lord God! What sweet names are Thine! How could Nietzsche not feel the music of that Hebrew-Greek combination? Perhaps he did; perhaps he masked a profound love behind his hatred. Jesus our Lord! Hebrew-Greek. But why Greek? Why . . . ?" Another pause in this sequestered chamber where the buzzing of an insect could assume a thunderous roar. "The eternal return. Why should Christ return? Must the earth be saved again and again and a billion times again? Awful thought of a God descending to a horrible death to cleanse the nameless myriads from sins which they seek ever as flies treacle. More ghastly still is the thought that the atheist Scandinavian put into the mouth of his Julian the Apostate: When our Christ is not saving this earth from eternal damnation then he may be visiting remote planets or inaccessible stars, where coloured double suns of blinding brilliancy revolve terrifically in twin harness. There, too, are souls to be rescued. What a grand idea! It is Ibsen's, as is the interpretation of the Third Kingdom. It should have been Nietzsche's. Why this antinomianism? Why this eternal conflict of evil and good, of night and day, of

VISIONARIES

sweet and sour, of God and devil, of Ormuzd and Ahriman?"

The exotic names transposed his thoughts to another avenue. If Christ is to come again, and the holy word explicitly states that He will, why not Buddha? Why not Brahma? Why not . . . ? Again a hiatus. This time something snapped in his head. He sank back in his chair. Buddha! Was there ever a Buddha? And if there was not, was there ever such a personality as Christ's? Scholar that he was he knew that myth-building was a pastime for the Asiatic imagination, great, impure, mysterious Asia — Asia the mother of all religions, the cradle of the human race. To deny the objective existence of Christ would set at rest all his doubts, one overwhelming doubt swallowing the minor doubts. He had never speculated at length upon the Christ legend, for did not Renan, yes, that silky heretic, believe in the personality of Jesus, believe and lovingly portray it? The Nietzsche doctrine of the eternal recurrence had so worked upon his sensitive mental apparatus that he could have almost denied the existence of Christ rather than deny that our universe repeats itself infinitely. Eternity is a wheel, earthly events are the spokes of this whirring wheel. It was the seeming waste of divine material that shocked his nerves. One crucifixion — yes; but two or two quintillions and infinitely more!

Brother Hyzlo stared at the crucifix. Was it only a symbol, as some learned blasphemers

THE THIRD KINGDOM

averred? The human figure so painfully extended upon it was a God, a God who descended from high heaven to become a shield between the wrath of His Father and humanity. Why? Why should the God who created us grow angry with our shortcomings? We are His handiwork. Are we then to blame for our imperfections? Is not Jesus, instead of a mediator, rather a votive offering to the wounded vanity of the great Jehovah? Was not Prometheus — a light broke in upon Hyzlo. Prometheus, a myth, Buddha a myth. All myths. There were other virgin-born saviours. Krishna, Mithra, Buddha. Vishnu had not one but nine incarnations. Christianity bears alarming resemblances to Mithraism. Mithra, too, was born in a cave. The dates of Christ's birth and death may be astronomical: the winter and vernal equinoxes. But the conflict of the authorities regarding these dates is mortifying. The four gospels are in reality four witnesses warring against each other. They were selected haphazard at a human council. They were not composed until the latter part of the second century, and the synoptic gospels are compilations from unknown writers, while the fourth gospel is a much later work. And how colourless, imitative, is the New when compared to the Old Testament, — echoing with the antiphonal thunders of Jehovah and his stern-mouthed Prophets! The passage in Josephus touching on Christ is now known to have been interpolated.

VISIONARIES

Authentic history does not record the existence of Christ. Not one of his contemporaries mentions him. That tremendous drama in Galilee was not even commented upon by the Romans, a nation keen to notice any deviation from normal history. The Jewish records are doubtful, written centuries after His supposed death. And they are malicious. What cannot happen in two centuries? Hyzlo reflected sadly upon Moslemism, upon Mormonism, upon the vagaries of a strange American sect at whose head was said to be a female pope.

The similarity of circumstances in the lives of Buddha and Christ also annoyed him. Both were born of virgins, both renounced the world, both were saviours. There were the same temptations, the same happenings; prophecies, miracles, celestial rejoicings, a false disciple, the seven beatitudes — a reflection of the Oriental wisdom — an expiatory death and resurrection. The entire machinery of the Christian church, its saints, martyrs, festivals, ritual, and philosophies are borrowed from the mythologies of the pagans. Sun-worship is the beginning of all religions. To the genius of the epileptic Paul, or Saul, — founders of religions are always epileptics, — a half Greek and disciple of the Pharisee Gamaliel, who saw visions and put to the sword his enemies, to Paul, called a saint, a man of overwhelming personal force, to this cruel anarchist, relentless, half-mad fanatic and his theological doctrines we owe the preservation and

THE THIRD KINGDOM

power of the Christian Church. At first the Christians were the miserable offscourings of society, slaves, criminals, and lunatics. They burrowed in the Catacombs, they fastened themselves upon a decaying and magnificent civilization like the parasites they were. A series of political catastrophes, a popular uprising against the rotten emperors of decadent Rome, and the wide growth of the socialist idea — these things and an unscrupulous man, Constantine the Great, put the Christians firmly in the saddle. And soon came cataracts of blood. If the tales of the imperial persecutions are true, then hath Christianity been revenged a million fold ; where her skirt has trailed there has been the cruel stain of slaughter. It must not be forgotten, too, that immorality of the grossest sort was promised the deluded sectarians, compared with which the Mahometan paradise is spiritual. And the end of the world was predicted at the end of every century, and finally relegated to the millennial celebration of Christianity's birth. When, in 1000 A.D., this catastrophe did not occur, the faith received its first great shock.

He summoned to his memory a cloud of witnesses, all contradictory. Josephus was barred. Philo Judæus, who was living near the centre of things, an observer on the scent of the spiritual, a man acquainted with the writings of Rabbi Hillel, and the father of Neoplatonism — never mentions Jesus, nor does he speak of any religious uprising in Judea. The passage in Virgil,

VISIONARIES

which has through the doubtful testimony of monkish writers been construed into a prophecy of a forthcoming Messiah, Hyzlo, who was a scholar, knew to have been addressed to a son of Virgil's intimate friend. Tacitus, too, has been interpolated. Seneca's ideal man is not Jesus, for Jesus is Osiris, Horus, Krishna, Mithra, Hercules, Adonis,—think of this beautiful young god's death!—Buddha. Such a mock trial and death could not have taken place under the Roman or Jewish laws. The sacraments derive from the Greeks, from the Indians—the mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus, from the *Haoma* sacrifice of the Persians, originally Brahmanic. The Trinity, was it not a relic of that ineradicable desire for polytheism implanted in the human bosom? Was the crucifixion but a memory of those darker cults and blood sacrifices of Asia, and also of the expiating goats sent out into the wilderness? What became of that Hosanna-shouting crowd which welcomed Christ on Palm Sunday? And there never were such places as Gethsemane and Calvary. Alas! the Son of Man had indeed no spot to lay his head. And why had He made no sign when on earth! Brother Hyzlo wept bitter tears.

But he wiped them away as he considered the similarity of the massacre of the Innocents in Judea and the massacre of the male children ordered by the wicked Indian Rajah of Madura, who feared the Krishna, just conceived by divine agency. Yes, the chronicles were full of these

THE THIRD KINGDOM

gods born of virgins, of crucifixions, — he could remember sixteen, — of these solar myths. He caught tripping in a thousand cases the translations of our holy books. The Ox and Ass legend at the Nativity he realized was the Pseudo-Matthew's description to Habakkuk of the literal presence: "In the midst of two animals thou shalt be known;" which is a mistranslated Hebrew text in the Prayer ascribed to Habakkuk. It got into the Greek Septuagint version of the Prophet made by Egyptian Jews before 150 B.C. It should read, "in the midst of the years," not "animals." "Ah!" cried Hyzlo, "in this as in important cardinal doctrines have the faithful been the slaves of the learned and unscrupulous pious forgers. Even the notorious Apollonius of Tyana imitated the miracles of Christ — all of them. And what of that wicked wizard, Simon Magus ?

The very repetition of these miracles in all races, at all epochs, pointed to the doctrine of recurrence. But back of all the negations, back of the inexpugnable proof that no such man or God as Christ existed, or was known to his contemporaries, Jewish and Roman, there must have been some legend which had crystallized into a mighty religion. Was He an agitator who preferred His obscurity that His glory might be all the greater? There *must* have been a beginning to the myth; behind the gospels — though they are obviously imitated from the older testaments, imitated and diluted —

VISIONARIES

were unknown writings; previous to these there was word of mouth and—and . . . ?

The day had advanced, the sun was very warm. A shaft of light fell upon the cold stone floor, and in its fiery particles darted myriads of motes. Hyzlo followed their spiral flights, thinking all the while of humanity which flashes from out the dark void, plays madly in the light, only to vanish into the unknown night. His gaze was held by the smoothness of the flagging at his feet. Then it became transformed into marble, the walls of his cell widened, and he closed his eyes, so blinding were the long ladders of light. . . .

II

TWO DREAMERS

He opened them . . . the harbour with its army of galleys and pleasure craft lay in the burning sunshine, its surface a sapphire blue. Overhead the sky echoed this tone, which modulated into deeper notes of purple on the far-away hills whose tops were wreathed in mist. Under his sandalled feet was marble, back of him were the gleaming spires and towers of the great city, and at his left was a mountain of shining marble, the Pharos.

“Alexandria?” he called out as he was jostled by a melon-seller, and startled by the fluted invitations of a young girl—an antique statue come to life.

THE THIRD KINGDOM

"Of course it is Alexandria," replied a deep, harsh voice at his elbow. He turned. It was his friend Philo.

"You have at last emerged from your day-dream, Hyzlo! I thought, as our bark clove the water, that you were enjoying visions." And it seemed to Hyzlo that he had just awakened from a bizarre dream of a monastic cell, to more beautiful sights and shapes and sounds. The pair now traversed the quay, past the signal masts, the fortified towers, pushing through the throng of sailors, courtesans, philosophers, fruitsellers, soldiers, beggars, and idle rich toward the spacious city. Past the palace to the wall of the Canal, along the banks of the Royal Port, they finally struck into a broad, deserted avenue. At its head was a garden wall. Philo introduced himself and his companion through a low door and presently they were both in an apartment full of parchments, glittering brass and gold instruments all reposing on a wide, long table.

"Hyzlo," said the Jewish philosopher, in his slightly accented Greek, "I have long promised you that I would reveal to you my secret, my life work. I am downcast by sadness. Rome is full of warring cults, Greek, African, Babylonian, Buddhistic; the writings of the great teachers, the masters, Heraclitus, Zeno, Anaxagoras, Plato, Socrates, Epictetus, Seneca, are overlaid with heretical emendations. The religion of my fellow-countrymen is a fiery furnace, Jerusalem a den of warring thieves. The rulers of earth

VISIONARIES

are weary and turn a deaf ear on their peoples. The time is ripe for revolt. Sick of the accursed luxury and debauchery, fearful of the threatening barbarians from Asia and the boreal regions, who are hemming the civilized world, waiting like vultures for the first sign of weakness to destroy everything, the slaves in revolt — all these impending terrors assure me that the end of the old order is at hand. But what will become of the new if there is no central belief to steady the ensanguined hands of furious mobs? For years I have bethought me of a drama, a gigantic world-drama which shall embody all the myths of mankind, all the noblest thoughts of the philosophers. I shall take the Buddha myth, surely the supreme myth, and transpose its characters to Jerusalem. A humble Jew shall be *my* Buddha. He shall be my revenge on our conquerors; for my people have been trampled upon by the insolent Romans, and who knows — a Jewish God, a crucified God, may be worshipped in the stead of Jupiter and his vile pantheon of gods and goddesses! *One* God, the son of Jahveh who comes upon earth to save mankind, is crucified and killed, is resurrected and like Elijah is caught up to heaven in a fiery chariot. But you know the usual style of these Asiatic legends! They are all alike; a virgin birth, a miraculous life, and transfiguration. That sums up myths from Adonis to Krishna, from Krishna to Buddha; though Monotheism comes from the Hebrews, the

THE THIRD KINGDOM

Trinity from the Indians, and the *logos* was developed by Plato. Where I am original is that I make my hero a Jew—the Jews are still half-cracked enough to believe in the coming of a Messiah. And to compass a fine dramatic moment I have introduced an incident I once witnessed in Alexandria at the landing of King Agrippa, when the populace dressed up a vagabond named Karabas as a mock king and stuck upon his head papyrus leaves for a crown, in his hand a reed for a sceptre, and then saluted him as king. I shall make my Jew-God seized by the Jews, his own blood and kin, given over to the Romans, mocked, reviled, and set aside for some thief who shall be called Karabas. Then, rejected, he shall be crucified, he a god born of a virgin, by the very people who are looking for their Messiah. He is their Messiah; yet they know it not. They shall never know it. That shall be their tragedy, the tragedy of my race, which, notwithstanding the prophecies, turned its back upon the Messiah because he came not clothed in the purple of royalty. Is that not a magnificent idea for a drama?"

"Excellent," answered Hyzlo, in a critical tone; "but continue!"

"You seem without enthusiasm, Hyzlo. I tell you that Æschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides never conceived a story more infinitely dramatic or pathetic, or — thanks to my Hebraic blood — so suffused with tragic irony. I shall make a very effective tableau at the death; on some

VISIONARIES

forbidding stony hill near Jerusalem I shall plant my crucified hero, and near him a converted courtesan — ah! what a master of the theatre I am! — in company with a handful of faithful disciples. The others have run away to save their cowardly skins in the tumult. The mobs that hailed him as King of the Jews now taunt him, after the manner of all mobs. His early life I shall borrow outright from the Buddha legends. He shall be born of a virgin; he shall live in the desert; as a child he shall confute learned doctors in the temple; and later in the desert he shall be tempted by a demon. All this is at hand. My chief point is the philosophies in which I shall submerge my characters.

“ My hero shall be the *logos* of Heraclitus with the superadded authority of the Hebrew high priest. You may recall the fact that I greatly admire the Essenes and their system. My deity is a pure essence; not Jehovah the protector or avenger. The *logos*, or mediator, I have borrowed from the writings of the Greek philosophers. This *logos* returns to the bosom of God after the sacrifice. Greek philosophy combined with Hebraic moral principles! Ah! it is grand synthesis; Seneca with his conception of a perfected humanity, Lucretius, Manlius — who called, rightfully too, Epicurus a god — and Heraclitus with the first idea of a *logos*: all these ancient ideas I have worked into my romantic play, including the old cult of the Trinities; the Buddhistic: Buddha, Dharma,

THE THIRD KINGDOM

and Saingha ; the Chinese : Heaven, Earth, and Emperor ; the Babylonian : Ea, the father, Marduk, the son, and the Fire God, Gibil, who is also the Paraclete. So my philosophy is merely a continuation and modification of that taught by Heraclitus and Plato, but with a Jewish background — for *mine* is the only moral nation. The wisdom of the Rabbis, their Monotheism and ethics, are all there.” His eyes were ablaze.

“ You are very erudite, Philo Judæus ! ” exclaimed his listener ; “ but, tell me, is there no actual foundation for your Jewish god ? ” Hyzlo eagerly awaited a reply, though he could not account for this curiosity.

“ Yes,” answered Philo, lightly, “ there is, I freely acknowledge, a slight foundation. Some years ago in Jerusalem they arrested a poverty-stricken fanatic, the son of a Jewess. His father was said to have been an indigent and aged carpenter. This Joshua, or Ieshua, was driven out of Jerusalem, and he took refuge among a lot of poor fishermen on Lake Gennesareth. There he joined a sect called the Baptists, because their founder, a socialist named Ioakanaan, poured water on the heads of the converted. Ieshua never married and was suspected of idolatrous practices, which he had absorbed from hermits of the Egyptian Thebaid. Josephus, a wise friend and companion of my youth, wrote me these details. He said that Ieshua disappeared after his mad attempt to take Jerusalem by storm, riding — as is depicted the Bona Dea —

VISIONARIES

on the back of a humble animal. Yet, if you wish to appeal to the common folk, make your hero a deposed king or divinity, who walks familiarly among the poor, as walked the gods at the dawn of time with the daughters of men. I depict my protagonist as a half-cracked Jew. I call him Jesus Christos — after Krishna; and this poor man's god proposes to redeem the world, to place the lowly in the seats of the mighty — he is an Anarchos, as they would say in Athens. He promises the Kingdom of God to those who follow him; but only a few do. He is the friend of outcasts, prostitutes, criminals. And though he does not triumph on earth, nevertheless he is the spiritual ruler of earth; he is the Son of the Trinity which comprises the Father and Holy Ghost. The contending forces to my hero will be incarnated by Pontius Pilatus, the Roman governor, and Judas of Kerioth, a very dangerous and powerful Hebrew politician — a man of very liberal ideas, one who believed in the supremacy of the West. What a glorious play it will make! I have named it The Third Kingdom, Hyzlo. What a glorious idea it is, Hyzlo — the greatest drama the world has ever witnessed!"

III

THE DOVE

"The greatest drama the world has ever witnessed" . . . mumbled his disciple. . . .

THE THIRD KINGDOM

The sun still shone on the cold stone flagging, and upon the wall facing him hung the crucifix. But the motes no longer danced merrily in the light. Evening was setting in apace, and Hyzlo, accepting one dream as equal in veracity with the other, crossed to the embrasure and, his elbows on the sill, watched the sun — looking like a sulphur-coloured cymbal — sink behind the sky-line. He was still in the same attitude when the blue of the heavens — ah! but not that gorgeous, hard Alexandrian blue — melted into peacock and cool saffron hues. He mused aloud :—

“ By the very nature of his mental organs man can never grasp reality. It is always the sensation, never the real thing, he feels. The metaphysicians are right. We can never know the actual world outside of ourselves. We are imprisoned in a dream cage ; the globe itself is a cage of echoes. Science, instead of contradicting religion, has but affirmed its truths. Matter is radiant energy — matter is electric phenomenon. The germ-plasma from which we stem — the red clay of Genesis — is eternal. The individual is sacrificed to the species. The species never dies. And how beautifully logical is the order of our ancestry as demonstrated by the science of embryology. Fish, batrachians, reptiles, mammals ; in which latter are included the marsupials as well as lemurs, primates, Man. And after what struggles Man assumed an erect position and looked into the eyes of his mate ! After Man ? Nietzsche preaches

VISIONARIES

that man is a link between the primate and Superman; Superman — the angels! But intelligence in man may be an accident caused by over-nutrition, the brain developing from rich phosphors. If this were so — how would fall to earth our house of pride! Are we so close to the animal? But Quinton proves that *after* man in the zoölogical series comes the bird. Birds — half reptiles, half angels. Angels! Do evolution and revelation meet here on common ground? Or was Joachim, the Abbot of Flores, inspired when he wrote of the Third Kingdom, that Kingdom in which the empire of the flesh is swallowed up in the empire of the spirit; that Third Kingdom in which the twin-natured shall reign, as Ibsen declares; the Messiah — neither Emperor nor Redeemer, but the Emperor-God. The slime shall become sap and the sap become spirit! From gorilla to God! Man in the coming Third Kingdom may say: "I, too, am a god." But is this not blasphemous? And after the wheel of the universe has again revolved, will I see, as foresaw Nietzsche, the selfsame spider, the same moonlight? There is nothing new under the sun, says Ecclesiastes. Wretched man is never to know the entire truth but will be always at daggers drawn with his destiny. After classic Paganism came romantic Christianity; after the romantic will the pendulum swing back — or — alas! is there coming another horde of atheists with a new Attila at their head?"

THE THIRD KINGDOM

He threw himself before the crucifix and sobbed.

“Lord Jesus, Our Christ! Thou art the real Christ and not the fiction of that supersubtle Greek-Jewish and boastful philosopher in Alexandria! Make for me, O God, a sign! Give me back in all its purity my faith; faith, noblest gift of all! Oh! to hear once more the thrilling of the harps divine, whereon the dawn plays, those precursors of the Eternal Harmony! *Gloria in Excelsis.*” He remained prostrate, his heart no longer battered by doubts and swimming in blissful love for his crucified God. The celestial hurricane subsided in his bosom; he arose and again interrogated the heavens. The stars in the profound splendours of the sky stared at him like the naked eyes of *houris*. Suddenly a vast white cloud sailed over the edge of the horizon and as it approached his habitation assumed the shape of a monstrous dove, its fleecy wings moving in solemn rhythms. In the resurgence of his hopes this apparition was the coveted sign from the Almighty.

And flat upon the floor of his cell, his face abased in the dust, Hyzlo worshipped in epileptic frenzy, crying aloud, after the manner of the sad-tongued Preacher:—

“The thing that hath been, it *is* that which shall be!”

XI

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

[In the Style of Mock-Mediæval Fiction]

I TOLD Michael to look sharply to his horse. It was dusk ; a few bits of torn clouds, unresolved modulations of nebulous lace, trembled over the pink pit in the west, wherein had sunk the sun ; and one evening star, silver pointed, told the tale of another spent day.

Michael was surly, I was impatient, and the groom, who lagged in the rear, whistled softly ; but I knew that both men were tired and hungry, and so were the horses. The road, hard and free from dust, echoed the resilient hoof-falls of our beasts. The early evening was finely cool, for it was the month of September. We had lost our way. Green fields on either side, and before us the path declined down a steep slope, that lost itself in huddled foliage.

Michael spoke up :—

“We are astray. I knew this damnable excursion would lead to no good.”

I gently chided him. “Pooh, you braggart ! Even Arnold, who rides a brute a world too wide for him, has not uttered a complaint. Brave Michael, if her ladyship heard you now !”

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

His face grew hard as he muttered :—

“ Her ladyship ! may all the saints in the calendar watch over her ladyship ! But I wish she had never taken you at your hot-headed word. Then we would not have launched upon this madcap adventure.”

I grew stern. “ Her ladyship, I bid you remember, my worthy man, is our mistress, and it ill behooves you to question her commands, especially in the presence of a groom.”

Michael growled, and then the sudden turn in the road startled our horses on a gallop, and for a quarter of an hour we thrashed our way ahead in the twilight. We had entered a small thicket when an ejaculation from Arnold — who had been riding abreast — brought us all up to a sharp standstill.

“ There’s a light,” said the groom, in a most tranquil manner, pointing his heavy crop stick to the left. How we had missed seeing the inn from the crest of the hill was strange. A hundred yards away stood a low, red-tiled house, with lights burning downstairs, and an unmistakable air of hostelry for man and beast. We veered at once in our course, and in a few minutes were hallooing for the host or the hostler.

“ Now I hope that you are satisfied, my friend,” I said exultantly to Michael, who only grunted as he swung off his animal. Arnold followed, and soon we were chatting with an amiable old man in a white cap and apron, who had run out of the house when we shouted.

VISIONARIES

"Amboise?" he answered me when I told him of our destination. "Amboise; why, sirrah, you are a good five leagues from Amboise! Step within and remain here for the night. I have plenty of convenience for you and your suite."

I glanced at Michael, but he was busily employed in loosening his pistols from the holster, and Arnold, in company with a lame man, led the horses to the stable. There was little use in vain regrets. The *other* had the start of the half-day, and surely we could go no further that night. I gritted my teeth as the little fat landlord led us into the house.

In half an hour we were smoking our pipes before a lively fire — the night had grown chilly — and enjoying silent recollections of a round of beef and several bottles of fortifying burgundy.

Our groom had gone to bed, and I soon saw that I could get nothing out of Michael for the present. He stared moodily into the fire. I noticed that his pistols were handy. The host came in and asked my permission to join us. He felt lonely, he explained, for he was a widower, and his only son was away in the world somewhere. I was very glad to ease myself with gossip; my heart was not quite at peace with this expedition of ours. I knew what her ladyship asked of us was much, so much that only a bold spirit and a thirst for the unknown could pardon the folly of the chase.

I bade the innkeeper to take a seat at the fire,

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

and soon we fell to chatting like ladies' maids. He was a Norman and curious as a cat. He opened his inquiries delicately.

"You have ridden far and fast to-day, my sir. Your horses were all but done for. Yet there is no cloud of war in the sky and you are too far from Paris to be honourable envoys. I hope you like our country?"

I dodged his tentative attempt at prying by asking him a question myself.

"You don't seem to have many guests, good host? Yet do I hardly wonder at it. You are all but swallowed up in the green and too far from the main travelled road."

The little man sighed and said in sad accents: "Too true, yet the Scarlet Dragon was once a thriving place, a fine money-breeding house. Before my son went away—"

I interrupted him. "Your son, what is he, and where is he now?"

The other became visibly agitated and puffed at his pipe some minutes before replying.

"Alas! worthy sir," he said at last in a lower key, "my son dare not return here for reasons I cannot divulge. Indeed, this was no cheerful house for the boy. He had his ambitions and he left me to pursue them."

"What does he do, this youngster?" interrupted Michael, in his gruffest tones. The landlord started.

"Indeed, good sir, I could not tell you, for I know not myself."

VISIONARIES

“Humph!” grunted my sullen companion; but I observed his suspicious little eyes fixed persistently on the man of the inn.

I turned the talk, which had threatened to languish. The old man did not relish the questions about his son, and began deplored the poor crops. At this juncture an indefinable feeling that we were losing time in stopping at this lonely place came over me. I am not superstitious, but I swear that I felt ill at ease and confused in my plans.

On bended knee I had sworn to my lady that I would bring back to her the fugitive unharmed, and I would never return to her empty-handed, confessing failure. Michael's queer behaviour disconcerted me. From the outset of the chase he had turned sour and inaccessible, and now he was so ill-tempered that I feared he would pick a quarrel at the slightest provocation with our host.

With a strange sinking at the heart I asked about our horses.

“They will be attended to, my sirs; my servant is a good boy. He is handy, although he can't get about lively, for he was thrown in a turnip field from our only donkey.”

I was in no mood for this sort of chatter and quizzed the fellow as to our beds.

“We must be off early in the morning; we have important business to transact at Amboise before the sun sets to-morrow,” I testily remarked.

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

“At Amboise — h’m, h’m! Well, I don’t mind telling you that you can reach Amboise by stroke of noon; and so you have business at Amboise, eh?”

I saw Michael’s brow lower at this wheedling little man’s question, and answered rather hastily and imprudently:—

“Yes, business, my good man, important business, as you will see when we return this road to-morrow night with the prize we are after.”

Michael jumped up and cried “*Damnation!*” and I at once saw my mistake. The landlord’s manner instantly altered. He looked at me triumphantly and said:—

“Beds, beds! but, my honoured sirs, I have no beds in the house. I forgot to tell you that no guest has been upstairs in years, for certain reasons. Indeed, sirs, I am so embarrassed! I should have told you at once I have only a day trade. My regular customers would not dare to stop here over night, as the house,—here a cunning, even sinister, look spread over the fellow’s fat face—“the house bears an evil reputation.”

Michael started and crossed himself, but not I. I suspected some deep devilry and determined to discover it.

“So ho? Haunted, eh? Well, ghosts and old women’s stories shan’t make me budge until dawn. Go fetch more wine and open it here, mine host of the Scarlet Dragon,” I roared.

VISIONARIES

The little man was nonplussed, hesitated a moment, and then trotted off.

I saw that Michael was at last aroused.

"What diabolical fooling is this? If the place is haunted, I'm off."

"I'm damned if I am," I said quite bravely, and more wine appeared. We both sat down.

The air had become nipping, and the blaze on the hearth was reassuring. Besides, the wind was querulous, and I didn't fancy a ride at midnight, even if my lady's quest were an urgent one.

Michael held his peace as the wine was poured out, and I insisted on the landlord drinking with us. We finished two bottles, and I sent for more. I foresaw that sleep was out of the question, and so determined to make a night of it.

"Touching upon this ghost," I began, when the other bade me in God's name not to jest. There were some things, he said, not to be broached in honest Christian company.

"A fig for your scruples!" I cried, emptying my glass; my head was hot and I felt bold. "A fig, I say, for your bogie-man nonsense! Tell me at what time doth this phantom choose to show itself." The landlord shivered and drew his seat closer to the fire.

"Oh, sir, do not jest! What I tell you is no matter for rude laughter. Begging your pardon for my offer, if you will be patient, I will relate to you the story, and how my misfortune came from this awful visitant."

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

Even Michael seemed placated, and after I nodded my head in token of assent the landlord related to us this story :—

Once upon a time, sirs, when the great and good Louis, sixteenth of his name, was King of France, this domain was the property of the Duke of Langlois. The duke was proud and rich, and prouder and haughtier was his duchess, who was born Berri. Ah ! they were mighty folk then, before the Revolution came with its sharp axes to clip off their heads. This inn was the stable of the château, which stood off yonder in the woods. Alas ! nothing remains of it to-day but a few blackened foundations, for it was burned to the earth by the red devils in '93. But at the time I speak of, the château was a big, rich palace, full of gay folk ; all the nobility came there, and the duchess ruled the land.

She was crazy for music, and to such lengths did she go in her madness that she even invited as her guests celebrated composers and singers. The duke was old-fashioned and hated those crazy people who lived only to hum and strum. He would have none of them, and quarrels with his duchess were of daily occurrence. Indeed, sirs, so bad did it become that he swore that he would leave the house if Messire Gluck, or Messire Piccini, or any of the other strolling vagabonds — so the duke called them — entered his château. And he kept his word, did the duke. The Chevalier Gluck, a fine, shapely

VISIONARIES

man, was invited down by the duchess and amused her and her guests by playing his wonderful tunes on the beautiful harpsichord in the great salon.

The duke would have none of this nonsense and went to Paris, where he amused himself gambling and throwing gold into his mistresses' laps. The duchess kept right on, and then the gossips of the neighbourhood began to wag their busy tongues. The lady of the château was getting very fine pleasure from the company of the handsome Austrian chevalier. It was whispered that the Queen Marie Antoinette had looked with favourable eyes upon the composer, and, furthermore, had lent him certain moneys to further his schemes for reforming the stage.

Reform, forsooth! all he cared for was the company of the duchess, and he vowed that he could make better music at the château than up in noisy Paris. On a fine afternoon it is said that it was no uncommon sight to see the chevalier, all togged up in his bravest court costume, sword and all, sitting at his harpsichord, playing ravishing music. This was out in the pretty little park back of the château, and the duchess would sit at Gluck's side and pour out champagne for him. All this may have been idle talk, but at last the duke got wind of the rumours, and one night he surprised the pair playing a duo at the harpsichord, and stabbed them both dead.

Since then the château was burned down, but the place has been haunted. I, myself, good

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

gentlemen, have heard ghostly music, and I swear to you—

“Oh, my God, listen, listen!”

“What pagan nonsense!” blurted out Michael.

I cautioned silence, and we all listened. The old man had slid off his chair, and his face was chalky white. Michael’s ugly mouth was half opened in his black beard, and I confess that I felt rather chilly.

Music, faint, tinkling, we certainly heard. It came with the wind in little sobs, and then silence settled upon us.

“It’s the Chevalier Gluck, and he is playing to his duchess out in the fields. See, I will open the door and show you,” whispered the fat landlord.

He went slowly to the door, and we followed him breathlessly. The door was pushed open, and we peered out. The wind was still high, and the moon rode among rolling boulders of yellow, fleecy clouds.

“There, there, over yonder, look; Mother of Christ, look at the ghost!” the old man pointed a shaking hand.

Just then the moonlight was blackened by a big cloud, and we heard the tinkling music of a harpsichord again, but could see naught. The sounds were plainer now, and presently resolved into the rhythmic accents of a gavotte. But it seemed far away and very plaintive!

“Hark,” said Michael, in a hoarse voice. “That’s the gavotte from Pagliacci. Listen! Don’t you remember it?”

VISIONARIES

"Pshaw!" I said roughly, for my nerves were all astir. "It's the Alceste music of Gluck."

"Look, look, gentlemen!" called our host, and as the moon glowed again in the blue we saw at the edge of the forest a white figure, saw it, I swear, although it vanished at once and the music ceased. I started to follow, but Michael and the old man seized my arms, the door was closed with a crash, and we found ourselves staring blankly into the fire, all feeling a bit shaken up.

It was Michael's turn to speak. "You may do what you please, but I stay here for the night, no sleep for me," and he placed his pistols on his knee.

I looked at the landlord and I thought I saw an expression of disappointment on his face, but I was not sure. He made some excuse about being tired and went out of the room. We spent the rest of the night in gloomy silence. We did not speak five words, for I saw that conversation only irritated my companion.

At dawn we walked into the sweet air and I called loudly for Arnold, who looked sleepy and out of sorts when he appeared. The fat old man came to see us off and smilingly accepted the silver I put into his hand for our night's reckoning.

"Au revoir, my old friend," I said as I pressed the unnecessary spur into my horse's flank. "Au revoir, and look out for the ghost of the gallant Chevalier Gluck. Tell him, with my compli-

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

ments, not to play such latter-day tunes as the gavotte from Pagliacci."

"Oh, I'll tell him, you may be sure," said he, quite dryly.

We saluted and dashed down the road to Amboise, where we hoped to capture our rare prize.

We had ridden about a mile when a dog attempted to cross our path. We all but ran the poor brute down.

"Why, it's lame!" exclaimed Arnold.

"Oh, if it were but a lame man, instead of a dog!" fervently said the groom, who was in the secret of our quest.

A horrid oath rang out on the smoky morning air. Michael, his wicked eyes bulging fiercely, his thick neck swollen with rage, was cursing like the army in Flanders, as related by dear old Uncle Toby.

"Lame man! why, oddsbodkins, that hostler was lame! Oh, fooled, by God! cheated, fooled, swindled and tricked by that scamp and scullion of the inn! Oh, we've been nicely swindled by an old wives' tale of a ghost!"

I stared in sheer amazement at Michael, wondering if the strangely spent night had upset his reason. He could only splutter out between his awful curses:—

"Gluck, the rascal, the ghost, the man we're after! That harpsichord—the lying knave—that tune—I swear it wasn't Gluck—oh, the rascal has escaped again! The ghost story—

VISIONARIES

the villain was told to scare us out of the house — to put us off the track. A thousand devils chase the scamp!" And Michael let his head drop on the pommel of his saddle as he fairly groaned in the bitterness of defeat.

I had just begun a dignified rebuke, for Michael's language was inexcusable, when it flashed upon me that we had been, indeed, duped.

"Ah," I cried, in my fury, "of course we were taken in! Of course his son was the lame hostler, the very prize we expected to bag! O Lord! what will we say to my lady? We are precious sharp! I ought to have known better. That stuff he told us! Langlois, pshaw, Berri — pouf! A Berri never married a Langlois, and I might have remembered that Gluck wasn't assassinated by a jealous duke. What shall we do?"

We all stood in the middle of the road, gazing stupidly at the lame dog that gave us the clue. Then Arnold timidly suggested:—

"Hadn't we better go back to the inn?"

Instantly our horses' heads were turned and we galloped madly back on our old tracks. Not a word was uttered until we reined up in front of the lonely house, which looked more haunted by daylight than it did the night before.

"What did I tell you?" suddenly cried Michael.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

THE HAUNTED HARPSICHORD

"Over there, you blind bat!" he said, coarsely and impatiently; and pulling out his pistol he fired thrice, and a low, melodious sound followed the reports of his weapon. When the smoke cleared away I saw that he had hit an old harpsichord which stood against a tree, facing the house.

"The ghost!" we yelled, and then we laughed consumedly. But the shots that winged the old-fashioned instrument had a greater result. The fat host appeared on the edge of the forest, and he waved a large napkin as a flag of truce. With him was the lame hostler.

"Mercy, gentlemen, mercy, we beseech you!" he cried, and we soon surrounded both and bound them securely.

"You will pay dearly for the trick you put upon us, my man," said Michael, grimly, and, walking our horses, we went by easy stages toward the castle, towing our prisoners along.

When I fetched the lame man to my lady, her face glowed with joy, and her Parisian eyes grew brilliant with victory.

"So you tried to escape?" she cruelly asked of the poor, cowering wretch. "You will never get another chance, I'll warrant me. Go, let the servants put you to work in the large music room first. Begin with the grands, then follow with the uprights. Thank you, gentlemen both, for the courage and finesse you displayed in this desperate quest. I'll see that you are both suitably rewarded." I fancied that Michael regarded

VISIONARIES

me sardonically, but he held his peace about the night's adventures.

We had indeed reason to feel flattered at the success of the dangerous expedition. Had we not captured, more by sheer good luck than strategy, the only piano-tuner in mediæval France?

XII

THE TRAGIC WALL

I

BY THE DARK POOL

It was not so high, the wall, as massive, not so old as moss-covered. After Rudolph Côt, the painter, had achieved celebrity with his historical canvas, *The Death of the Antique World*, now in the Louvre, he bought the estate of Chalfontaine, which lies at the junction of two highroads: one leading to Ecouen, the other to Villiers-le-Bel. Almost touching the end of the park on the Ecouen side there is a little lake, hardly larger than a pool, and because of its melancholy aspect—sorrowful willows hem it about, drooping into stagnant waters—Monsieur Côt had christened the spot: The Dark Tarn of Auber. He was a fanatical lover of Poe, reading him in the Baudelaire translation, and openly avowing his preference for the French version of the great American's tales. That he could speak only five words of English did not deter his associates from considering him a profound critic of literature.

After his death his property and invested

VISIONARIES

wealth passed into the hands of his youthful widow, a charming lady, a native of Burgundy, and — if gossip did not lie — a former model of the artist; indeed, some went so far as to assert that her face could be seen in her late husband's masterpiece — the figure of a young Greek slave attired as a joyous bacchante. But her friends always denied this. Her dignified bearing, sincere sorrow for her dead husband, and her motherly solicitude for her daughter left no doubt as to the value of all petty talk. It was her custom of summer evenings to walk to the pool, and with her daughter Berenice she would sit on the broad wall and watch the moon rise, or acknowledge the respectful salutations of the country folk with their bran-speckled faces. In those days Villiers-le-Bel was a dull town a half-hour from Paris on the Northern Railway, and about two miles from the station.

The widow was not long without offers. Her usual answer was to point out the tiny Berenice, playing in the garden with her nurse. Then a landscape painter, one of the Barbizon group, appeared, and, as a former associate of Rudolph Côt, and a man of means and position, his suit was successful. To the astonishment of Villiers-le-Bel, Madame Valerie Côt became Madame Théophile Mineur; on the day of the wedding little Berenice — named after a particularly uncanny heroine of Poe's by his relentless French admirer — scratched the long features of her stepfather. The entire town accepted this

THE TRAGIC WALL

as a distressing omen and it was not deceived ; Berenice Côt grew up in the likeness of a determined young lady whose mother weakly endured her tyranny, whose new father secretly feared her.

At the age of eighteen she had refused nearly all the young painters between Ecouen and Domaine de Vallières ; and had spent several summers in England, and four years at a Lausanne school. She feared neither man nor mouse, and once, when she saw a famous Polish pianist walking on his terrace at Morges, she took him by the hand, asked for a lock of his hair, and was not refused by the amiable virtuoso. After that Berenice was the acknowledged leader of her class. The teachers trembled before her sparkling, wrathful black eyes. At home she ruled the household, and as she was an heiress no one dared to contradict her. Her contempt for her stepfather was only matched by her impatience in the company of young men. She pretended—so her intimates said—to loathe them. “Frivolous idiots” was her mildest form of reproof when an ambitious boy would trench upon her pet art theories or attempt to flirt. She called her mother “the lamb” and her stepfather “the parrot”—he had a long curved nose; all together she was very unlike the pattern French girl. Her favourite lounging place was the wall, and after she had draped it with a scarlet shawl and perched herself upon it, she was only too happy

VISIONARIES

to worry any unfortunate man who presented himself.

The night Hubert Falcroft called at Chalfontaine Mademoiselle Élise Evergonde told him that her cousin, Madame Mineur, and Berenice had gone in the direction of the pool. He had walked over from the station, preferring the open air to the stuffy train. So a few vigorous steps brought to his view mother and daughter as they slowly moved, encircling each other's waist. The painter paused and noted the general loveliness of the picture; the setting sun had splashed the blue basin overhead with delicate pinks, and in the fretted edges of some high floating cloud-fleece there was a glint of fire. The smooth grass parquet swept gracefully to the semicircle of dark green trees, against the foliage of which the virginal white of the gowns was transposed to an ivory tone by the blue and green keys in sky and forest.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "paint in the foreground a few peacocks languidly dragging their gorgeous tails, and you have a Watteau or a Fragonard — no, a Monticelli! Only, Monticelli would have made the peacocks the central motive with the women and trees as an arabesque."

He was a portraitist who solemnly believed in the principle of decoration — character must take its chances when he painted. Falcroft was successful with women's heads, which he was fond of depicting in misty shadows framed by luxuri-

THE TRAGIC WALL

ous accessories. They called him the Master of Chiffon, at Julien's; when he threw overboard his old friends and joined the new crowd, their indignation was great. His title now was the Ribbon Impressionist, and at the last salon of the Independents, Falcroft had the mortification of seeing a battalion of his former companions at anchor in front of his picture, *The Lady with the Cat*, which they reviled for at least an hour. He was an American who had lived his life long in France, and only showed race in his nervous, brilliant technic and his fondness for bizarre subjects. . . .

He had not stood many minutes when a young voice saluted him:—

“Ah, Monsieur Falcroft. Come, come quickly. Mamma is delighted to see you!” His mental picture was decomposed by the repeated waving of the famous shawl, which only came into view as Berenice turned. Hubert regretted that she had not worn it—the peacocks could have been exchanged for its vivid note of scarlet. Pretending not to have heard her speech, he gravely saluted the mother and daughter. But Berenice was unabashed.

“Mamma was wondering if you would visit us to-night, Monsieur Falcroft, when I saw you staring at us as if we were ghosts.” A burst of malicious laughter followed.

“Berenice, ,Berenice,” remonstrated her mother, “when will you cease such tasteless remarks!” She blushed in her pretty matronly

VISIONARIES

fashion and put her hand on her daughter's mouth.

"Don't mind her, Madame Mineur! I like to meet a French girl with a little unconventionality. Berenice reminds me now of an English girl—"

"Or one of your own countrywomen!" interrupted Berenice; "and please—*Miss*, after this, I am a grown young lady." He joined in the merriment. She was not to be resisted and he wished—no, he did not wish—but he thought, that if he were younger, what gay days he might have. Yet he admired her mother much more. Elaine Côt-Mineur was an old-fashioned woman, gentle, reserved, and at the age when her beauty had a rare autumnal quality—the very apex of its perfection; in a few years, in a year, perhaps, the change would come and crabbed winter set in. He particularly admired the oval of her face, her soft brown eyes, and the harmonious contour of her head. He saw her instantly with a painter's imagination—filmy lace must modulate about her head like a dreamy aureole; across her figure a scarf of yellow silk; in her hands he would paint a crystal vase, and in the vase one rose with a heart of sulphur. And her eyes would gaze as if she saw the symbol of her age—the days slipping away like ropes of sand from her grasp. He could make a fascinating portrait he thought, and he said so. Instantly another peal of irritating laughter came from Berenice:—

THE TRAGIC WALL

"Don't tell papa. He is *so* jealous of the portrait he tried to make of mamma last summer. You never saw it! It's awful. It's hid away behind a lot of canvases in the atelier. It looks like a Cézanne still-life. I'll show it to you sometime." Her mother revealed annoyance by compressing her lips. Falcroft said nothing. They had skirted the pool in single file, for the path was narrow and the denseness of the trees caused a partial obscurity. When they reached the wall, the moon was rising in the eastern sky.

"*L'heure exquise,*" murmured Madame Mineur. Berenice wandered down the road and Hubert helped her mother to the wall, where he sat beside her and looked at her. He was a big, muscular man with shaven cheeks, dark eyes, and plenty of tumbled hair, in which flecks of gray were showing. He had been a classmate of Théophile Mineur, for whose talents or personality he had never betrayed much liking. But one day at a *déjeuner*, which had prolonged itself until evening, Mineur insisted on his old friend—the Burgundy was old, too—accompanying him to Villiers-le-Bel, and not without a motive. He knew Falcroft to be rich, and he would not be sorry to see his capricious and mischievous stepdaughter well settled. But Falcroft immediately paid court to Madame Mineur, and Berenice had to content herself with watching him and making fun to her step-father of the American painter's height and ges-

VISIONARIES

tures. The visit had been repeated. Berenice was amused by a dinner *en ville* and a theatre party, and then Hubert Falcroft became a friend of the household. When Mineur was away painting, the visits were not interrupted.

"Listen," said Madame Mineur; "I wish to speak with you seriously, my dear friend." She made a movement as if to place her hand on his shoulder, but his expression — his face was in the light — caused her to transfer her plump fingers to her coiffure, which she touched dexterously. Hubert was disappointed.

"I am listening," he answered; "is it a sermon, or consent — to that portrait? Come, give in — Elaine." He had never called her by this name before, and he anxiously awaited the result. But she did not relax her grave attitude.

"You must know, Monsieur Falcroft, what anxieties we undergo about Berenice. She is too wild for a French girl, too wild for her age — "

"Oh, let her enjoy her youth," he interrupted.

"Alas! that youth will be soon a thing of the past," she sighed. "Berenice is past eighteen, and her father and I must consider her future. Figure to yourself — she dislikes young men, eligible or not, and you are the only man she tolerates."

"And I am hopelessly ineligible," he laughingly said.

"Why?" asked the mother, quietly.

"Why! Do you know that I am nearing

THE TRAGIC WALL

forty? Do you see the pepper and salt in my hair? After one passes twoscore it is time to think of the past, not of the future. I am over the brow of the hill; I see the easy decline of the road — it doesn't seem as long as when I climbed the other half." He smiled, threw back his strong shoulders, and inhaled a huge breath of air.

"Truly you are childish," she said; "you are at the best part of your life, of your career. Yes, Théophile, my husband, who is so chary in his praise, said that you would go far if you cared." Her low, warm voice, with its pleading inflections, thrilled him. He took her by the wrist.

"And would it please *you*, if I went far?" She trembled.

"Not too far, dear friend — remember Berenice."

"I remember no one but you," he impatiently answered; and relaxing his hold, he moved so that the moonlight shone on her face. She was pale. In her eyes there were fright and hope, decision and delight. He admired her more than ever.

"Let me paint you, Elaine, these next few weeks. It will be a surprise for Mineur. And I shall have something to cherish. Never mind about Berenice. She is a child. I am a middle-aged man. Between us is the wall — of the years. Never should it be climbed. While *you* — "

VISIONARIES

"Be careful — Hubert. Théophile is your friend."

"He is not. I never cared for him. He dragged me out here after he had been drinking too much, and when I saw you I could not stay away. Hear me — I insist! Berenice is nice, but the wall is too high for her to climb; it might prove a — "

"How do you know the wall is too steep for Berenice?" the girl cried as she scaled the top with apish agility, where, after a few mocking steps in the moonlight, she sank down breathless beside Hubert, and laughed so loudly that her mother was fearful of hysteria.

"Berenice! Berenice!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, Berenice is all right, mamma. Master Hubert, I want you to paint my portrait before papa returns — that's to be in four weeks, isn't it?" The elder pair regarded her disconcertedly.

"Oh, you needn't look so dismal. I'll not tell tales out of school. Hubert and mamma flirting! What a glorious jest! Isn't life a jest, Hubert? Let's make a bargain! If you paint mamma, you paint me, also. Then — you see — papa will not be jealous, and — and — " She was near tears her mother felt, and she leaned over Hubert and took the girl's hand. She grazed the long fingers of the painter, who at once caught both feminine hands in his.

"Now I have you both," he boasted, and was shocked by a vicious tap on the cheek — Bere-

THE TRAGIC WALL

nice in rage pulled her left hand free. Silence ensued. Hubert prudently began to roll another cigarette, and Madame Mineur retreated out of the moonlight, while Berenice turned her back and soon began to hum. The artist spoke first:

"See here, you silly Berenice, turn around! I want to talk to you like a Dutch uncle—as we say in the United States. Of course I'll paint you. But I begin with your mother. And if you wish me to like you better than ever, don't say such things as you did. It hurts your—mother." His voice dropped into its deepest bass. She faced him, and he saw the glitter of wet eyelashes. She was charming, with her hair in disorder, her eyes two burning points of fire.

"I beg your pardon, mamma; I beg your pardon, Hubert. I'll be good the rest of this evening. Isn't it lovely?" She sniffed in the breeze with dilating nostrils, and the wild look of her set him to wondering how such a gentle mother could have such a gypsy daughter. Perhaps it was the father—yes, the old man had been an Apache in his youth according to the slang of the studios.

"But you must paint me as I wish, not as you will," resumed Berenice. "I hate conventional portraits. Papa Mineur chills me with his cabinet pictures of haughty society ladies, their faces as stiff as their starched gowns."

"Oh, Berenice, will you never say polite things of your father?"

VISIONARIES

"Never," she defiantly replied. "He wouldn't believe me if I did. No, Hubert, I want to pose as Ophelia. Oh, don't laugh, please!" They could not help it, and she leaped to the grass and called out:—

"I don't mean a theatrical Ophelia, singing songs and spilling flowers; I mean Ophelia drowned—" she threw herself on the sward, her arms crossed on her bosom, and in the moonlight they could see her eyes closed as if by death.

"Help me down, Hubert. That girl will go mad some day." He reached the earth and he gave her a hand. Berenice had arisen. Sulkily she said:—

"Shall I step into the Dark Tarn of Auber and float for you? I'll make a realistic picture, my Master Painter—who paints without imagination." And then she darted into the shrubbery and was lost to view. Without further speech the two regained the path and returned to the house.

II

THE CRIMSON SPLASH

When Éloise was asked by Berenice how long Monsieur Mineur would remain away on his tour, she did not reply. Rather, she put a question herself: why this sudden solicitude about the little-loved stepfather. Berenice jokingly answered

THE TRAGIC WALL

that she thought of slipping away to Switzerland for a *vacance* on her own account. Éloise, who was not agreeable looking, viewed her charge suspiciously.

"Young lady, you are too deep for me. But you'll bear watching," she grimly confessed. Berenice skipped about her teasingly.

"I know something, but I won't tell, unless you tell."

"What is it?"

"Will you tell?"

"Yes."

"When is he coming back, and where is he now?" she insisted.

"Your father, you half-crazy child, expects to return in a month — by the first of June. And if you wish to wire or write him, let me know."

"Now I won't tell you *my secret*," and she was off like a gale of wind. Éloise shook her head and wondered.

In the atelier Hubert painted. Elaine sat on a dais, her hands folded in her lap; about her head twisted nun's-veiling gave her the old-fashioned quality of a Cosway miniature — the very effect he had sought. It was to be a "pretty" affair, this picture, with its subdued lighting, the face being the only target he aimed at; all the rest, the suave background, the gauzy draperies, he would brush in — suggest rather than state.

"I'll paint her soul, that sensitive soul of hers which tremulously peeps out of her eyes," he thought. Elaine was a patient subject. She

VISIONARIES

took the pose naturally and scarcely breathed during the weary sittings. He recalled the early gossip and sought to evoke her as a professional model. But he gave up in despair. She was hopelessly "ladylike," and to interpret her adequately, only the decorative patterns of earlier men — Mignard, Van Loo, Nattier, Largillière — would translate her native delicacy.

For nearly four weeks he had laboured on the face, painting it in with meticulous touches only to rub it out with savage disgust. To transcribe those tranquil, liquid eyes, their expression more narve than her daughter's — this had proved too difficult a problem for the usually facile technique of Falcroft. Give him a brilliant virtuoso theme and he could handle it with some of the sweep and splendour of the early Carolus Duran or the brutal elegance of the later Boldini. But Madame Mineur was a pastoral. She did not express nervous gesture. She was seldom dynamic. To "do" her in dots like the *pointillistes* or in touches after the manner of the earlier impressionists would be ridiculous. Her abiding charm was her repose. She brought to him the quiet values of an eighteenth-century eclogue — he saw her as a divinely artificial shepherdess watching an unreal flock, while the haze of decorative atmosphere would envelop her, with not a vestige of real life on the canvas. Yet he knew her as a natural, lovable woman, a mother who had suffered and would

THE TRAGIC WALL

suffer because of her love for her only child. It was a paradox, like many other paradoxes of art.

The daughter — ah ! perhaps she might better suit his style. She was admirable in her madcap carelessness and exotic colouring. Decidedly he would paint her when this picture was finished — if it ever would be.

Berenice avoided entering the studio during these sittings. She no longer jested with her mother about the picture, and with Hubert she preserved such an air of dignity that he fancied he had offended her. He usually came to *Villiers-le-Bel* on an early train three or four times a week and remained at *Chalfontaine* until ten o'clock. Never but once had a severe storm forced him to stay overnight. Since the episode on the wall he had not attempted any further advances. He felt happy in the company of Elaine, and gazing into her large eyes rested his spirit. It was true — he no longer played with ease the rôle of a soul-hunter. His youth had been troubled by many adventures, many foolish ones, and now he felt a calm in the midway of his life and that desire for domestic ease which sooner or later overtakes all men. He fancied himself painting Elaine on just such tranquil summer afternoons under a soft light. And oh ! the joys of long walks, discreet gossip, and dinners at a well-served table with a few chosen friends. Was he, after all, longing for the flesh-pots of the philistine — he, Hubert Falcroft, who

VISIONARIES

had patrolled the boulevards like other sportsmen of midnight !

At last the picture began to glow with that inner light he had so patiently pursued. Elaine Mineur looked at him from the canvas with veiled sweetness, a smile almost enigmatic lurking about her lips. Deepen a few lines and her expression would be one of contented sleekness. *That* Hubert had missed by a stroke. It was in her eyes that her chief glory abided. They were pathetic without resignation, liquid without humidity, indescribable in colouring and form. Their full cup and the accents which experience had graven under them were something he had never dreamed of realizing. It was a Cosway ; but a Cosway broadened and without a hint of genteel namby-pamby or overelaborate finesse. Hubert was fairly satisfied. Madame Mineur had little to say. During the sittings she seldom spoke, and if their eyes met, the richness of her glance was a compensation for her lack of loquacity. Hubert did not complain. He was in no hurry. To be under the same roof with this adorable woman was all that he asked.

The day after he had finished his picture, he returned to Chalfontaine for the midday breakfast. Berenice was absent—in her room with a headache, her mother explained. The weather was sultry. He questioned Elaine during the meal. Had Berenice's temper improved ? They passed out to the balcony where their coffee was served, and when he lighted his cig-

THE TRAGIC WALL

arette, Madame Mineur begged to be excused. She had promised Cousin Éloise to pay some calls. He strolled over the lawn, watching the hummocks of white clouds which piled up in architectural masses across the southern sky. Then he remembered the portrait and mounted to the atelier. As he put his hand on the knob of the door he thought he heard some one weeping. Suddenly the door was pulled from his grasp and Berenice appeared. Her hair hung on her shoulders. She was in a white dressing-gown. Her face was red and her eyes swollen. She did not attempt to move. Affectionately Hubert caught her in his arms and asked about her headache.

“It is better,” she answered in scarcely audible accents.

“Why, you poor child! I hope you are not going to be ill! Have you been racing in the sun without your hat?”

“No. I haven’t been out of doors since yesterday.”

“What’s the matter, little Berenice? Has some one been cross with her?” She pushed him from her violently.

“Hubert Falcroft, when you treat me as a woman and not as a child —”

“But I am treating you as a woman,” he said. Her dark face became tragic. She had emerged from girlhood in a few hours. And as he held her closer some perverse spirit entered into his soul. Her vibrating youth and beauty forced

VISIONARIES

him to gaze into her blazing eyes until he saw the pupils contract.

"Let me go!" she panted. "Let me free! I am not a doll. Go to your portrait and worship it. Let me free!"

"And what if I do not?" Something of her rebellious feeling filled his veins. He felt younger, stronger, fiercer. He put his arms about her neck and, after a silent battle, kissed her. Then she pushed by him and disappeared. He could see nothing, after the shock of the adventure, for some moments, and the semi-obscurity of the atelier was grateful to his eyes. A picture stood on the easel, but it was not, he fancied, the portrait. He went to the centre of the room where hung the cords that controlled the curtains covering the glass roof. Then in the flood of light he barely recognized the head of Elaine. It was on the easel, and with a sharp pain at his heart he saw across the face a big crimson splash.

* * * * *

III

MOON-RAYS

The dewy brightness of tangled blush roses had faded in the vague twilight; through the aisles of the little wood leading to the pool the light timidly flickered as Hubert and Elaine walked with the hesitating steps of perplexed

THE TRAGIC WALL

persons. They had not spoken since they left the house — there in a few hurried words he told her of the accident and noted with sorrow the look of anguish in her eyes. Without knowing why, they went in the direction of the wall.

There was no moon when they reached the highroad. It would rise later, Elaine said in her low, slightly monotonous voice. Hubert was so stunned by the memory of his ruined picture that he forgot his earlier encounter with Berenice — that is, in describing it he had failed to minutely record his behaviour. But in the cool evening air his conscience became alive and he guiltily wondered whether he dare tell his misconduct — no, imprudence? Why not? She regarded him as a possible husband for Berenice — but how embarrassing! He made up his mind to say nothing; when the morrow came he would write Elaine the truth and bid her good-by. He could not in honour continue to visit this home where resided the woman he loved — with a jealous daughter. Why jealous? What a puzzle, and what an absurd one! He helped Elaine to a seat on the wall and sat near her. For several minutes neither spoke. They were again facing the pool, which looked in the dusk like a cracked mirror.

"It is not clear yet to me," murmured Elaine. "That the unfortunate child has always been more or less morbid and sick-brained, I have been aware. The world, marriage, and active

VISIONARIES

existence will mend all that, I hope. I fear she is a little spoilt and selfish. And she doesn't love me very much. She has inherited all her father's passion for Poe's tales. My dear friend, she is jealous—that's the only solution of this shocking act. She disliked the idea of my portrait from the start. You remember on this spot hardly a month ago she challenged you to paint her as the drowned Ophelia!—and all her teasing about Monsieur Mineur and his jealousy, and—”

“Our flirtation,” added Hubert, sadly.

“Oh, pray do not say such a thing! She is so hot-headed, so fond of you. Yes, I saw it from the beginning, and your talk about the insurmountable wall of middle-age did not deceive me. I only hope that will not be a tragic wall for her, for you—or for me. . . .”

Her words trailed into a mere whisper. He put his hand over hers and again they were silent. About them the green of the forest had been transformed by the growing night into great clumps of velvety darkness and the vault overhead was empty of stars. June airs fanned their discontent into mild despair, and simultaneously they dreamed of another life, of a harmonious existence far from Paris, into which the phantom of Théophile Mineur would never intrude. Yet they made no demonstration of their affection—they would have been happy to sit and dream on this moon-haunted wall, near this nocturnal pool, forever. Hubert pictured

THE TRAGIC WALL

Berenice in her room, behind bolted doors, lying across the bed weeping, or else staring in sullen repentance at the white ceiling. Why had she indulged in such vandalism? The portrait was utterly destroyed by the flaring smear laid on with a brush in the hand of an enraged young animal. What sort of a woman might not develop from this tempestuous girl! He knew that he had mortally offended her by his rudeness. But it was after, not before, the cruel treatment of his beloved work. Yet, how like a man had been his rapid succumbing to transitory temptation! For it was transitory—of that he was sure. The woman he loved, with a reverent love, was next to him, and if his pulse did not beat as furiously at this moment as earlier in the day, why—all the better. He was through forever with his boyish recklessness.

“Another peculiar thing,” broke in Elaine, as if she had been thinking aloud, “is that Berenice has been pestering Eloise for her father’s address.”

“Her father’s address?” echoed her companion.

“Yes; but whether she wrote to him Éloise could not say.”

“Why should she write to him? She dislikes him—dislikes him almost as much—” he was about to pronounce his own name. She caught him up.

“Yes, that is the singular part of this singular affair. She felt slighted because you painted

VISIONARIES

my portrait before hers. I confess I have had my misgivings. You should have been more considerate of her feelings, Hubert, my friend." She paused and sighed. For him the sigh was a spark that blew up the magazine of his firmest resolves. He had been touching her hands fraternally. His arm embraced her so that she could not escape, as this middle-aged man told his passion with the ardour of an enamoured youth.

"You dare not tell me you do not care for me! Elaine—let us reason. I loved you since the first moment I met you. It is folly to talk of Mineur and my friendship for him. I dislike, I despise him. It is folly to talk of Berenice and her childish pranks. What if she did cruelly spoil my work, *our* work! She will get over it. Girls always do get over these things. Let us accept conditions as they are. Say you love me—a little bit—and I'll be content to remain at your side, a friend, *always* that. I'll paint you again—much more beautifully than before." He was hoarse from the intensity of his feelings. The moon had risen and tipped with its silver brush the tops of the trees.

"And—my husband? And Berenice?"

"Let things remain as they are." He pressed her to him. A crackling in the underbrush and a faint splash in the lake startled them asunder. They listened with ears that seemed like beating hearts. There was no movement; only a night bird plaintively piped in the distance and a clock struck the quarter.

THE TRAGIC WALL

Elaine, now thoroughly frightened, tried to get down from the wall. Hubert restrained her, and as they stood thus, a moaning like the wind in autumnal leaves reached them. The moon-rays began to touch the water, and suddenly a nimbus of light formed about a floating face in the pool. The luminous path broadened, and to their horror they saw Berenice, her hair outspread, her arms crossed on her young bosom, lying in the little lake. Elaine screamed :—

“ My God ! My God ! It is Berenice ! — Berenice, I am punished for my wickedness to you ! ” Hubert, stunned by the vision, did not stir, as the almost fainting mother gripped his neck.

And then the eyes of the whimsical girl opened. A malicious smile distorted her pretty face. Slowly she arose, a dripping ghost in white, and pointing her long, thin fingers in the direction of the Ecouen road she mockingly cried :—

“ There is some one to see your portrait at last, dear Master Painter.” And saying this she vanished in the gloom, instantly followed by her agitated mother.

Hubert turned toward the wall, and upon it he recognized the stepfather of Berenice. After staring at each other like two moonstruck wights, the American spoke :—

“ I swear that I, alone, am to blame for this — ” The other wore the grin of a malevolent satyr. His voice was thick.

VISIONARIES

"Why apologize, Hubert? You know that it has been my devoted wish that you marry Berenice." He swayed on his perch. Hubert's brain was in a fog.

"Berenice!" said he.

"Yes — Berenice. Why not? She loves you."

"Then — you — Madame Mineur —" stammered Hubert. The Frenchman placed his finger on his nose and slyly whispered:—

"Don't be afraid! I'll not tell my wife that I caught Berenice with you alone in the park — you Don Juan! Now to the portrait — I must see that masterpiece of yours. Berenice wrote me about it." He nodded his head sleepily.

"Berenice wrote you about it!" was the mechanical reply.

"I'll join you and we'll go to the house." He tried to step down, but rolled over at Hubert's feet.

"What a joke is this champagne," he growled as he was lifted to his tottering legs. "We had a glorious time this afternoon before I left Paris. Hurrah! You're to be my son-in-law. And, my boy, I don't envy you — that's the truth. With such a little demon for a wife — I pity you, pity you — hurrah!"

"I am more to be despised," muttered Hubert Falcroft, as they moved away from the peaceful moonlit wall.

XIII

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

I came not to send peace, but a sword. . . . I am come to send fire on the earth.

I

HER living room was a material projection of Yetta Silverman's soul. The apartment, on the north side of Tompkins Square, was small, sunny, and comfortable. From its windows in spring and summer she could see the boys and girls playing around the big, bare park, and when her eyes grew tired of the street she rested them on her beloved books and pictures. On one wall hung the portraits of Herzen, Bakounine and Kropotkin — the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of the anarchistic movement, as she piously called them. Other images of the propaganda were scattered over the walls : Netschajew — the St. Paul of the Nihilists — Ravachol, Octave Mirbeau, Jean Grave, Reclus, Spies, Parsons, Engels, and Lingg — the last four victims of the Haymarket affair, and the Fenians, Allen, Larkin, and O'Brien, the Manchester martyrs. Among the philosophers, poets, and artists were Schopenhauer, Tolstoy, Max Stirner

VISIONARIES

— a rare drawing — Ibsen, Thoreau, Emerson — the great American individualists — Beethoven, Zola, Richard Strauss, Carlyle, Nietzsche, Gorky, Walt Whitman, Dostoiëwsky, Mazzini, Rodin, Constantin Meunier, Shelley, Turgénieff, Bernard Shaw, and finally the kindly face and intellectual head of the lawyer who so zealously defended the Chicago anarchists. This diversified group, together with much revolutionary literature, poems, pamphlets, the works of Proudhon, Songs Before Sunrise, by Swinburne, and a beautiful etching of Makart's proletarian Christ, completed, with an old square pianoforte, the ensemble of an individual room, a room that expressed, as her admirers said, the strong, suffering soul of Yetta Silverman, Russian anarchist, agitator, and exile.

"Come in," she cried out in her sharp, though not unpleasant, voice. A thin young man entered. She clapped her hands.

"Oh, so you changed your mind!" He looked at her over his glasses with his weak, blue eyes, the white of which predominated. Simply dressed, he nevertheless gave the impression of superior social station. He was of the New England theological-seminary type — narrow-chested, gaunt as to visage, by temperament drawn to theology, or, in default of religious belief, an ardent enthusiast in sociology. The contracted temples, uncertain gaze, and absence of fulness beneath the eyes betrayed the unimaginative man. Art was a sealed book to

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

him, though taxation fairly fired his suspicious soul. He was nervous because he was dyspeptic, and at one time of his career he mistook stomach trouble for a call to the pulpit. And he was a millionaire more times than he took the trouble to count.

"Yes," he timidly replied, "I *did* change my wavering mind — as you call that deficient organ of mine — and so I returned. I hope I don't disturb you!"

"No, not yet. I am sitting with my hands folded in my lap, like the women of your class — *ladies*, you call them." She accented the title, without bitterness. A cursory estimate of her appearance would have placed her in the profession of a trained nurse, or perhaps in the remotest analysis, a sewing woman of superior tastes. She was small, wiry, her head too large for her body; but the abounding nervous vitality, the harsh fire that burned in her large brown eyes, and the firm mouth would have attracted the attention of the most careless. Her mask, with its high Slavic cheek-bones and sharp Jewish nose, proclaimed her a magnetic woman. In her quarter on the far East Side the children called her "Aunt Yetta." She was a sister of charity in the guise of a revolutionist.

"You sit but you think, and *my* ladies never think," he answered, in his boyish voice. He seemed proud to be so near this distinguished creature. Had she not been sent to Siberia, driven out of France and Germany, and arrested

VISIONARIES

in New York for her incendiary speeches? She possessed the most extraordinary power over an audience. Once, at Cooper Union, Arthur had seen her control a crazy mob bent on destroying the building because a few stupid police had interfered with the meeting. Among her brethren Yetta Silverman was classed with Louise Michel, Sophia Perowskaia, and Vera Zassoulitch, those valiant women, true guardian angels, veritable martyrs to the cause. He thought of them as he watched the delicate-looking young woman before him.

Arthur was too chilly of blood to fall in love with her; his admiration was purely cerebral. He was unlucky enough to have had for a father a shrewd, visionary man, that curious combination of merchant and dreamer once to be found in New England. A follower of Fourier, a friend of Emerson, the elder Wyartz had gone to Brook Farm and had left it in a few months. Dollars, not dreams, was his true ambition. But he registered his dissatisfaction with this futile attempt by christening his only son, Arthur Schopenhauer; it was old Wyartz's way of getting even with the ideal. Obsessed from the age of spelling by his pessimistic middle name, the boy had grown up in a cloudy compromise of rebellion and the church. For a few years he vacillated; he went to Harvard, studied the Higher Criticism, made a trip abroad, wrote a little book recording the contending impulses of his pale, harassed soul—Oscillations was the

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

title — and returned to Boston a mild anarchist. Emerson the mystic, transposed to the key of France, sometimes makes bizarre music.

She arose and, walking over to him, put her hand nonchalantly on his shoulder.

“Arthur, comrade, what do you mean to do with yourself — come, what will all this enthusiasm bring forth?” He fumbled his glasses with his thumb and index finger — a characteristic gesture — and nervously regarded her before answering. Then he smiled at his idea.

“We might marry and fight the great fight together like the Jenkins crowd.”

“Marry!” she exclaimed — her guttural Russian accent manifested itself when she became excited — “marry! You are only a baby, Arthur Schopenhauer Wyartz — *Herrgott*, this child bears *such* a name! — and while I am sure the thin Yankee blood of the Jenkins family needed a Jewish wife, and a Slav, I am not that way of thinking for myself. I am married to the revolution.” Her eyes dwelt with reverence on her new Christian saints, those Christs of the gutter, who had sacrificed their lives in the modern arena for the idea of liberty, who were thrown to the wild beasts and slaughtered by the latter-day pagans of wealth, and barbarians in purple. He followed her glance. It lashed him to jerky enthusiasm.

“I am not joking,” he earnestly asserted, “so pardon my rashness. Only believe in my sincerity. I am no anarchist on paper. I am de-

VISIONARIES

voted to your cause and to you, Yetta, to my last heart's blood. Do you need my wealth? It is yours. You can work miracles with millions in America. Take it all."

"It's not money we need, but men," she answered darkly. "Your millions, which came to you innocently enough, represent the misery of — how many? Let the multi-millionnaires give away their money to found theological colleges and libraries — *my* party will have none of it. Its men are armed by the ideas that we prefer. I don't blame the rich or the political tyrants — the mob has to be educated, the unhappy proletarians, who have so long submitted to the crack of the whip that they wouldn't know what to do with their freedom if they had it. All mobs believe alike in filth and fire, whether antique slaves free for their day's Saturnalia, or the Paris crowds of '93. Their ideas of happiness are pillage, bloodshed, drunkenness, revenge. Every popular uprising sinks the *people* deeper in their misery. Every bomb thrown discredits the cause of liberty."

Astonished by this concession, Arthur wondered how she had ever earned her reputation as the Russian "Red Virgin," as an unequivocal terrorist. Thus he had heard her hailed at all the meetings which she addressed. But she did not notice his perturbation, she was following another train.

"You Americans do not love money as much as the Europeans — who hoard it away, who wor-

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

ship it on their naked knees; but you do something worse — you love it for the sake of the sport, a cruel sport for the poor. You go into speculation as the English go after big game. It is a sport. This sport involves food — and you gamble with wheat and meat for counters, while starving men and women pay for the game. America is yet rich enough to afford this sport, but some day it will become crowded like Europe, and then, beware! Wasn't it James Hinton who said that 'Overthrowing society means an inverted pyramid getting straight'?

"And America," she continued, "bribes us with the gilded sentimental phrases of Rousseau, Mirabeau, and Thomas Paine woven into your national constitution, with its presumptuous declaration that all men are born free and equal — shades of Darwin and Nietzsche! — and that universal suffrage is a panacea for all evils. In no country boasting itself Christian is there a system so artfully devised for keeping the *poor* free and unequal, no country where so-called public opinion, as expressed in the press, is used to club the majority into submission. And you are all proud of this liberty — a liberty at which the despised serf in Russia or the man of the street in London sneers — there is to-day more *individual* liberty in England and Germany than in the United States. Don't smile! I can prove it. As for France or Italy — they are a hundred years ahead of you in municipal government. But I shan't talk blue-books at you, Arthur!"

VISIONARIES

"Why not, why not?" he quickly interposed. "You always impress me by your easy handling of facts. And why won't my money be of use to the social revolution?" Scornfully she started up again and began walking.

"Why? Because convictions can't be bought with cash! Why! Because philanthropy is the most selfish of vices. You may do good here and there—but you do more harm. You create more paupers, you fine gentlemen, with your Mission houses and your Settlement workers! You are trying to cover the ugly sores with a plaster of greenbacks. It won't heal the sickness—it won't heal it, I tell you." Her eyes were flaming and she stamped the floor passionately.

"We workers on the East Side have a name for you millionnaires. We call you the White Mice. You have pretty words and white lies, pretty ways and false smiles. Lies! lies! lies! You are only giving back, with the aid of your superficial fine ladies, the money stolen from the true money earners. You have discovered the Ghetto—you and the impudent newspaper men. And like the reporters you come down to use us for 'copy.' You live here in comfort among us and then go away, write a book about our wretchedness and pose as altruistic heroes in your own silly set. How I loathe that word—altruism! As if the sacrifice of your personality does not always lead to self-deception, to hypocrisy! It is an excuse for the busybody-rich to advertise their charities. If they were as many armed as Briareus or the

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

octopus, their charity would be known to each and every hand on their arms. These sentimental anarchs! They even marry our girls and carry them off to coddle their conscience with gilded gingerbread. Yet they would turn their backs on Christ if he came to Hester Street—Christ, the first modern anarchist, a destructionist, a proletarian who preached fire and sword for the evil rich of his times. Nowadays he would be sent to Blackwell's Island for six months as a disturber of the peace or for healing without a license from the County Medical Association!"

"Like Johann Most," he ventured. She blazed at the name.

"No jokes, please. Most, too, has suffered. But I am no worshipper of bombs—and beer." This made him laugh, but as the laugh was not echoed he stared about him.

"But Yetta,—we must begin somewhere. I wish to become—to become—something like you.—"

She interrupted him roughly:

"To become—you an anarchist! You are a sentimental rebel because your stomach is not strong enough for the gourmands who waste their time at your clubs. If your nerves were sound you might make a speech. But the New England conscience of your forefathers—they were nearly all clergymen, weren't they?—has ruined your strength. The best thing you can do, my boy, is to enter a seminary and later go

VISIONARIES

to China as a missionary ; else turn literary and edit an American edition of Who's Who in Hell ! But leave our East Side alone. Do you know what New York reminds me of ? Its centre is a strip of green and gold between two smouldering red rivers of fire—the East and West Sides. If they ever spill over the banks, all the little parasites of greater parasites, the lawyers, brokers, bankers, journalists, ecclesiastics, and middle men, will be devoured. Oh, what a glorious day ! And oh, that terrible night when we marched behind the black flag and muffled drums down Broadway, that night in 1887 when the four martyrs were murdered, the hero Lingg having killed himself. What would you have done in those awful times ? ”

“ Try me,” he muttered, as he pulled down his cuffs, “ try me ! ”

“ Very well, I'll try you. Like Carlo Cafiero, the rich Italian anarchist, you must give your money to us — every cent of it. Come with me to-night. I address a meeting of the brethren at Schwab's place — you know, the saloon across the street, off the square. We can eat our supper there, and then — ”

“ Try me,” he reiterated, and his voice was hoarse with emotion, his pulse painfully irregular.

II

Notwithstanding his vows of heroism, Arthur could not force himself to like the establishment

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

of Schwab, where the meeting was to take place. It was a beer-saloon, not one of those mock-medieval uptown palaces, but a long room with a low ceiling, gaslit and shabby. The tables and chairs of hard, coarse wood were greasy — napkins and table-cloths were not to be mentioned, else would the brethren suspect the presence of an aristocrat. At the upper end, beyond the little black bar, there was a platform, upon it a table, a pianoforte, and a stool. Still he managed to conceal his repugnance to all these uninviting things and he sipped his diluted Rhine wine, ate his sandwich — an unpalatable one — under the watchful eyes of his companion. By eight o'clock the room was jammed with working-people, all talking and in a half dozen tongues. Occasionally Yetta left him to join a group, and where she went silence fell. She was the oracle of the crowd. At nine o'clock Arthur's head ached. He had smoked all his Turkish cigarettes, the odour of which caused some surprise — there was a capitalist present and they knew him. Only Yetta prevented disagreeable comment. The men, who belonged to the proletarian class, were poorly dressed and intelligent; the women wore shawls on their heads and smoked bad cigarettes. The saloon did not smell nice, Arthur thought. He had offered Yetta one of his imported cigarettes, but she lighted a horrible weed and blew the smoke in his face.

At ten o'clock he wished himself away. But

VISIONARIES

a short, stout man with a lopsided face showing through his tangled beard, stood up and said in German :—

“ All who are not *our* friends, please leave the house.”

No one stirred. The patron went from group to group saluting his customers and eying those who were not. Whether any password or signal was given Arthur could not say. When the blond, good-natured Schwab reached him, Yetta whispered in his ear. The host beamed on the young American and gave him a friendly poke in the back; Arthur felt as if he had been knighted. He said this to Yetta, but her attention was elsewhere. The doors and windows were quickly shut and bolted. She nudged his elbow—for they were sitting six at the table, much to his disgust; the other four drank noisily—and he followed her to the top of the room. A babble broke out as they moved along.

“ It’s Yetta’s new catch. Yetta’s rich fellow. Wait until she gets through with him—poor devil.” These broken phrases made him shiver, especially as Yetta’s expression, at first enigmatic, was now openly sardonic. What did she mean? Was she only tormenting him? Was this to be his test, his trial? His head was almost splitting, for the heat was great and the air bad. Again he wished himself home.

They reached the platform. “ Jump up, Arthur, and help me,” she commanded. He

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

did so. But his discomfiture only grew apace with the increased heat—the dingy ceiling crushed him—and the rows in front, the entire floor seemed transformed to eyes, malicious eyes. She told him to sit down at the piano and play the Marseillaise. Then standing before the table she drew from her bosom a scarlet flag, and accompanied by the enthusiastic shoutings she led the singing. Arthur at the keyboard felt exalted. Forgotten the pains of a moment before. He hammered the keys vigorously, extorting from the battered instrument a series of curious croakings. Some of the keys did not “speak,” some gave forth a brazen clangour from the rusty wires. No one cared. The singing stopped with the last verse.

“Now La Ravachole for our French brethren.” This combination of revolutionary lyrics—Ça Ira and Carmagnole—was chanted fervidly. Then came for the benefit of the German the stirring measures from the Scotch-German John Henry Mackay’s *Sturm* :—

Das ist der Kampf, den allnächtlich
Bevor das Dunkel zerrinnt,
Einsam und gramvoll auskämpft
Des Jahrhunderts verlorenes Kind.

Yetta waved her long and beautifully shaped hands—they were her solitary vanity. The audience became still. She addressed them at first in deliberate tones, and Arthur noted that the interest was genuine—he wondered how

VISIONARIES

long his fat-witted club friends could endure or appreciate the easy manner in which Yetta Silverman quoted from great thinkers, and sprinkled these quotations with her own biting observations.

“Richard Wagner—who loved humanity when he wrote Siegfried and regretted that love in Parsifal!

“Richard Wagner—who loved ice-cream more than Dresden’s freedom—Wagner: the Swiss family bell-ringer of ‘48!

“To Max Stirner, Ibsen, and Richard Strauss belongs the twentieth century!

“Nietzsche—the anarch of aristocrats!

“Karl Marx—or the selfish Jew socialist!

“Lassalle—the Jew comedian of liberty!

“Bernard Shaw—the clever Celt who would sacrifice socialism for an epigram.

“Curse all socialists!” she suddenly screamed.

Arthur, entranced by the playful manner with which she disposed of friend and foe, was aghast at this outbreak. He saw another Yetta. Her face was ugly and revengeful. She sawed the air with her thin arms.

“Repeat after me,” she adjured her hearers, “the Catechism of Sergei Netschajew, but begin with Herzen’s noble motto: ‘Long live chaos and destruction!’”

“Long live chaos and destruction!” was heartily roared.

The terrific catechism of the apostle Netschajew made Arthur shake with alternate woe and

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

wrath. It was bloody-minded beyond description. Like a diabolic litany boomed the questions and answers:—

“Day and night we must have but one thought — inexorable destruction.” And Arthur recalled how this pupil of Bakounine had with the assistance of Pryow and Nicolajew beguiled a certain suspected friend, Ivanow, into a lonely garden and killed him, throwing the body into a lake. After that Netschajew disappeared, though occasionally showing himself in Switzerland and England. Finally, in 1872, he was nabbed by the Russian government, sent to Siberia, and — !

Ugh! thought Arthur, what a people, what an ending! And Yetta — why did she now so openly proclaim destruction as the only palliative for social crime when she had so eloquently disclaimed earlier in the day the propaganda by force, by dagger, and dynamite? — He had hardly asked himself the question when there came a fierce rapping of wooden clubs at door and window. Instantly a brooding hush like that which precedes a hurricane fell upon the gathering. But Yetta did not long remain silent.

“Quick, Arthur, play the Star-Spangled Banner! It’s the police. I want to save these poor souls — ” she added, with a gulp in her throat; “quick, you idiot, the Star-Spangled Banner.” But Arthur was almost fainting. His fingers fell listlessly on the keys, and they were too weak to make a sound. The police!

VISIONARIES

he moaned, as the knocking deepened into banging and shouting. What a scandal! What a disgrace! He could never face his own world after this! To be caught with a lot of crazy anarchists in a den like this! — Smash, went the outside door! And the newspapers! They would laugh him out of town. He, Arthur Schopenhauer Wyartz, the Amateur Anarch! He saw the hideous headlines. Why, the very daily in which some of his fortune was invested would be the first to mock him most!

The assault outside increased. He leaped to the floor, where Yetta was surrounded by an excited crowd. He plucked her sleeve. She gazed at him disdainfully.

“For God’s sake, Yetta, get me out of this — this awful scrape. My mother, my sisters — the disgrace!” She laughed bitterly.

“You poor chicken among hawks! But I’ll help you — follow me.” He reached the cellar stairs, and she showed him a way by which he could walk safely into the alley, thence to the street back of their building. He shook her hand with the intensity of a man in the clutches of the ague.

“But you — why don’t you go with me?” he asked, his teeth chattering.

The brittle sound of glass breaking was heard. She answered, as she took his feverish hand :—

“Because, you brave revolutionist, I must stick to my colours. Farewell!” And remounting the stairs, she saw the bluecoats awaiting her,

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

"I hope the police will catch him anyhow," she said. It was her one relapse into femininity, and as she quietly surrendered she did not regret it.

III

Old Koschinsky's store on the avenue was the joy of the neighbourhood. For hours, their smeary faces flattened against the glass, the children watched the tireless antics of the revolving squirrels; the pouter pigeons expand their breasts into feathered balloons; the gold-fish, as they stolidly swam, their little mouths open, their eyes following the queer human animals imprisoned on the other side of the plate-glass window. Canary birds by the hundreds made the shop a trying one for sensitive ears. There were no monkeys. Koschinsky, whose heart was as soft as butter, though he was a formidable revolutionist — so he swore over at Schwab's — declared that monkeys were made in the image of tyrannical humans. He would have none of them. Parrots? There were enough of the breed around him, he told the gossiping women, who, with their *scheitels*, curved noses, and shining eyes, lent to the quarter its Oriental quality.

It was in Koschinsky's place that Arthur first encountered Yetta. He was always prowling about the East Side in search of sociological prey, and the modest little woman with her

VISIONARIES

intelligent and determined face attracted him strongly. They fell into easy conversation near a cage of canaries, and the acquaintance soon bloomed into a friendship. A week after the raid on Schwab's, Arthur, very haggard and nervous, wandered into Koschinsky's. The old man greeted him :—

“Hu! So you've just come down from the Island! Well—how did you like it up there? Plenty water—eh?” The sarcasm was too plain, and the young man, mumbling some sort of an answer, turned to go.

“Hold on there!” said Koschinsky. “I expect a very fine bird soon. You'd better wait. It was here only last night; and the bird asked whether you had been in.” Arthur started.

“For me? Miss Silverman?”

“I said a bird,” was the dogged reply. And then Yetta walked up to Arthur and asked :—

“Where have you been? Why haven't you called?” He blushed.

“I was ashamed.”

“Because you were so, so—frightened, that night?”

“Yes.”

“But nothing came of the affair. The police could get no evidence. We had no flags—”

“That scarlet one I saw you with—what of it?” She smiled.

“Did you look in your pockets when you got home? I stuffed the flag in one of them while

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

we were downstairs." He burst into genteel laughter.

"No, I threw off my clothes in such disgust that night that I vowed I would never get into them again. I gave the suit to my valet."

"Your valet," she gravely returned; "he may become *one of us*."

"Fancy, when I reached the house — I went up in a hansom, for I was bareheaded — my mother was giving the biggest kind of a ball. I had no end of trouble trying to sneak in unobserved."

She regarded him steadily. "Isn't it strange," she went on, "how the bull-dog police of this town persecute us — and they *should* be sympathetic. They had to leave their own island because of tyranny. Yet as soon as they step on this soil they feel themselves self-constituted tyrants. Something of the sort happened with your own ancestors —" she looked at him archly — "the Pilgrim Fathers were not very tolerant to the Quakers, the Jews, Catholics, or any sect not their own. Now you do not seem to have inherited that ear-slicing temperament —"

"Oh, stop, Yetta! Don't make any more fun of me. I confess I am cowardly — I hate rows and scandals —"

"What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his liberty?'"

"Yes, I know. But this was such a nasty little affair. The newspapers would have driven me crazy."

VISIONARIES

"But suppose, for the sake of argument," she said, "that the row would not have appeared in the newspapers — what then ? "

"What do you mean? By Jove, there was nothing in the papers, now that I come to think of it. I went the next morning out to Tuxedo and forgot — what do you mean by this mystery, Yetta ? "

"I mean this — suppose, for the sake of further argument, I should tell you that there was no row, no police, no arrests ! " He gasped.

"O-h, what an ass I made of myself. So that was your trial! And I failed. Oh, Yetta, Yetta — what shall I say ? " The girl softened. She took both his hands in her shapely ones and murmured : —

"Dear little boy, I treated you roughly. Forgive me ! There was a real descent by the police — it was no deception. That's why I asked you to play the Star-Spangled Banner — "

"Excuse me, Yetta ; but why did you do that ? Why didn't you meet the police defiantly chanting the Marseillaise ? That would have been braver — more like the true anarchist." She held down her head.

"Because — because — those poor folks — I wanted to spare them as much trouble with the police as possible," she said in her lowest tones.

"And why," he pursued triumphantly, "why did you preach bombs after assuring me that reform must come through the spiritual propaganda ? " She quickly replied : —

A SENTIMENTAL REBELLION

"Because our most dangerous foe was in the audience. You know. The man with the beard who first spoke. He has often denounced me as lukewarm; and then you know words are not as potent as deeds with the proletarians. One assassination is of more value than all the philosophy of Tolstoy. And that old wind-bag sat near us and watched us — watched me. That's why I let myself go — " she was blushing now, and old Koschinsky nearly dropped a bird-cage in his astonishment.

"Yetta, Yetta!" Arthur insisted, "wind-bag, you call your comrade? Were you not, just for a few minutes, in the same category?" Again she was silent.

"I feel now," he ejaculated, as he came very close to her, "that we must get outside of these verbal entanglements. I want you to become my wife." His heart sank as he thought of his mother's impassive, high-bred air — with such a figure for a Fifth Avenue bride! The girl looked into his weak blue eyes with their area of saucer-like whiteness. She shook her stubborn head.

"I shall never marry. I do not believe in such an institution. It degrades women, makes tyrants of men. No, Arthur — I am fond of you, perhaps — " she paused, — "so fond that I might enter into any relation but marriage, — that never!"

"And I tell you, Yetta, anarchy or no anarchy, I could never respect the woman if she were

VISIONARIES

not mine legally. In America we do these things differently—" he was not allowed to finish.

She glared at him, then she strode to the shop door and opened it.

"Farewell to you, Mr. Arthur Schopenhauer Wyartz, amateur anarchist. Better go back to your mother and sisters! *Mein Gott*, Schopenhauer, too!" He put his Alpine hat on his bewildered head and without a word went out. She did not look after him, but walked over to the old bird-fancier and sat on his leather-topped stool. Presently she rested her elbows on her knees and propped her chin with her gloveless hands. Her eyes were red. Koschinsky peeped at her and shook his head.

"Yetta—you know what I think!—Yetta, the boy was right! You shouldn't have asked him for the Star-Spangled Banner! The *Marseillaise* would have been better."

"I don't care," she viciously retorted.

"I know, I know. But a nice boy — *so well fixed.*"

"I don't care," she insisted. "I'm married to the revolution."

"Yah, yah! the revolution, Yetta—" he pushed his lean, brown forefinger into the cage of an enraged canary—"the revolution! Yes, Yetta Silverman, the revolution!" She sighed.

XIV

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOT- STEPS

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run.

— *Pilgrim's Progress.*

I

As the first-class carriage rolled languidly out of Balak's only railway station on a sultry February evening, Pobloff, the composer, was not sorry.

"I wish it were Persia instead of Ramboul," he reflected. Luga, his wife, he had left weeping at the station; but since the day she disappeared with his orchestra for twenty-four hours, Pobloff's affection had gradually cooled; he was leaving the capital without a pang on a month's leave of absence—a delicate courtesy of the king's extended to a brother ruler, though a semi-barbarous one, the khedive of Ramboul.

Pobloff was not sad nor was he jubilantly glad. The journey was an easy one; a night and day and the next night would see him, God willing,—he crossed himself,—in the semi-tropical city of Nirgiz. From Balak to Nirgiz, from southeastern Europe to Asia Minor!

The heir-apparent was said to be a music-

VISIONARIES

loving lad, very much under the cunning thumb of his grim old aunt, who, rumour averred, wore a black beard, and was the scourge of her little kingdom. All that might be changed when the prince would reach his majority ; his failing health and morbid melancholy had frightened the grand vizier, and the king of Balakia had been petitioned to send Pobloff, the composer, designer of inimitable musical masques, Pobloff, the irresistible interpreter of Chopin, to the aid of the ailing youth.

So this middle-aged David left his nest to go harp for a Saul yet in his adolescence. What his duties were to be Pobloff had not the slightest idea. He had received no special instructions ; a member of the royal household bore him the official mandate and a purse fat enough to soothe his wife's feelings. After appointing his first violin conductor of the Balakian Orchestra during his absence, the fussy, stout, good-natured Russian (he was born at Kiew, 1865, the biographical dictionaries say) secured a sleeping compartment on the Ramboul express, from the windows of which he contemplated with some satisfaction the flat land that gradually faded in the mists of night as the train tore its way noisily over a rude road-bed.

II

Pobloff slept. He usually snored ; but this evening he was too fatigued. He heard not the sudden stoppages at lonely way stations where

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

hoarse voices and a lantern represented the life of the place ; he did not heed the engine as it thirstily sucked water from a tank in the heart of the Karpakians ; and he was surprised, pleased, proud, when a hot February sun, shining through his window, awoke him.

It was six o'clock of a fine morning, and the train was toiling up a precipitous grade to the spine of the mountain, where the down-slope would begin and air-brakes rule. Pobloff looked about him. He scratched his long nose, a characteristic gesture, and began wondering when coffee would be ready. He pressed the bell. The guard entered, a miserable bandit who bravely wore his peaked hat with green plumes à la Tyrol. He spoke four tongues and many dialects ; Pobloff calculated his monthly salary at forty roubles.

" No, Excellency, the coffee will be hot and refreshing at Kerb, where we arrive about seven." He cleared his throat, put out his hand, bowed low, and disappeared. The composer grumbled. Kerb! — not until that wretched eyrie in the clouds ! And such coffee ! No matter. Pobloff never felt in robuster health ; his irritable nerves were calmed by a sound night's sleep. The air was fresher than down in the malarial valley, where stood the shining towers of Balak ; he could see them pinked by the morning sun and low on the horizon. All together he was glad. . . .

Hello, this must be Kerb ! A moment later

VISIONARIES

Pobloff bellowed for the guard; he had shattered the electric annunciator by his violence. Then, not waiting to be served, he ran into the vestibule, and soon was on the station platform, inhaling huge drafts of air into his big chest. Ah! It was glorious up there. What surprised him was the number of human beings clambering over the steps, running and gabbling like a lot of animals let loose from their cages. The engineer beside his quivering machine enjoyed his morning coffee. And there were many turbaned pagans and some veiled women mixed with the crowd.

The sparkling of bright colours and bizarre costumes did not disturb Pobloff, who had lived too long on anonymous borders, where Jew, Christian, Turk, Slav, African, and outlandish folk generally melted into a civilization which still puzzled ethnologists.

A negro, gorgeously clad, guarding closely a slim female, draped from head to foot in virginal white, attracted the musician. The man's face was monstrous in its suggestion of evil, and furthermore shocking, because his nose was a gaping hole. Evidently a scimiter had performed this surgical operation, Pobloff mused.

The giant's eyes offended him, they so stared, and threateningly.

Pobloff was not a coward. After his adventure in Balak, he feared neither man nor devil, and he insolently returned the black fellow's gaze. They stood about a buffet and drank

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

coffee. The young woman — her outlines were girlish — did not touch anything; she turned her face in Pobloff's direction, so he fancied, and spoke at intervals to her attendant.

"I must be a queer-looking bird to this Turk and her keeper — probably some Georgian going to a rich Mussulman's harem in company with his eunuch," Pobloff repeated to himself.

A gong was banged. Before its strident vibrations had ceased troubling the thin morning air, the train began to move slowly out of Kerb. Pobloff again was glad.

He remained on the rear platform of his car as long as the white station, beginning to blister under a tropical sun, was in sight. Then he sought his compartment. His amazement and rage were great when he found the two window seats occupied by the negro and the mysterious creature. Pobloff's bag was tumbled in a corner, his overcoat, hat, and umbrella tossed to the other end of the room. The big black man bared his teeth smilingly, the shrouded girl shrank back as if in fear.

"Well, I'll be — !" began the composer. Then he leaned over and pushed the button, the veins in his forehead like whipcords, his throat parched with wrath. But to no avail — the bell was broken. Pobloff's first impulse was to take the smiling Ethiopian by the neck and pitch him out. There were several reasons why he did not: the giant looked dangerous; he plainly carried a brace of pistols, and at least one dag-

VISIONARIES

ger, the jewelled handle of which flashed over his glaring sash of many tints. And then the lady — Pobloff was very gallant, too gallant, his wife said. The bell would not ring! What was he to do? He soon made up his mind, supple Slav that he was. With a muttered apology he sank back and closed his eyes in polite despair.

His consternation was overwhelming when a voice addressed him in Russian, a contralto voice of some indefinable timbre, the voice of a female, yet not without epicene intonations. His eyes immediately opened. From her gauze veiling the young woman spoke:—

“We are sorry to derange you. The guard made a mistake. Pardon!” The tone was slightly condescending, as if the goddess behind the cloud had deigned to notice a mere mortal. Her attendant was smiling, and to Pobloff his grin resembled a newly sliced watermelon. But her voice filled him with ecstasy. His ear, as sensitive as the eye of a Claude Monet, noted every infinitesimal variation in tone-colour, and each shade was a symbol for the fantastic imagination of this poetic composer. The girlish voice affected him strangely. It pierced his soul like a poniard. It made his spine chilly. It evoked visions of white women languorously moving in processional attitudes beneath the chaste rays of an implacable moon. The voice modulated into crisp morning inflections:—

“You are going far, Excellency?” She knew

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

him! And the slave who grinned and grinned and never spoke — what was *he*? She seemed to follow Pobloff's thought.

"Hamet is dumb. His tongue was cut at the same time he lost his nose. It all happened at the siege of Yerkutz."

Pobloff at last found words.

"Poor fellow!" he said sympathetically, and then forgot all about the mutilated one. "You are welcome to this compartment," he assured her in his oiliest manner. "What surprises me is that I did not see your Serene Highness when we left Balak." She started at the title that he bestowed upon her, and he inwardly chuckled. Clever dog, Pobloff, clever dog! Her eyes were brilliant despite obstructing veils.

"I was *en route* to Balak yesterday, but my servant became ill and I stopped over night at Kerb." Pobloff was entranced. She was undoubtedly a young dame of noble birth and her freedom, the freedom of a European woman, delighted him. It also puzzled.

"How is it — ?" he asked.

But they had begun that fearful descent, at once the despair and delight of engineers. The mountain fell away rapidly as the long, clumsy train raced down its flank at a breakneck pace. Pobloff shivered and clutched the arms of his seat. He saw nothing but deep blue sky and the tall top of an occasional tree. The racket was terrific, the heat depressing. She sat in her corner, apparently sleeping, while the giant

VISIONARIES

smiled, always smiled, never removing his ugly eyes from the perspiring countenance of Pobloff.

As they neared earth's level, midday was over. Pobloff hungered. Before he could go in search of the ever absent guard, the woman suddenly sat up, clapped her hands, and said something ; but whether it was Turkish, Roumanian, or Greek, he couldn't distinguish. A hamper was hauled from under the seat by the servant, and to his joy Pobloff saw white rolls, grapes, wine, figs, and cheese. He bowed and began eating. The others looked at him and for a moment he could have sworn he heard faint laughter.

"I am so hungry," he said apologetically. "And you, Serenity, won't you join me?" He offered her fruit. It was declined with a short nod. He was dying to smoke, and, behold ! priceless Turkish tobacco was thrust into his willing hand. He rolled a stout cigarette, lighted it. Then a sigh reached his ears. "The lady smokes," he thought, and slyly chuckled.

A sound of something tearing was heard, and a pair of beautiful hands reached for the tobacco. In a few moments the slender fingers were pressing a cigarette ; the slave lighted a wax fusee ; the lady took it, put the cigarette in a rent of her veil, and a second volume of odorous vapour arose. Pobloff leaned back, stupefied. A Mohammedan woman smoking in a Trans-Caucasian railway carriage before a Frank ! Stupendous ! He felt unaccountably gay.

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

"This is joyful," he said aloud. She smoked fervently. "Western manners are certainly invading the East," he continued, hoping to hear again that voice of marvellous resonance. She smoked. "Why, even Turkish women have been known to study music in Paris."

"I am not a Turk," she said in her deepest chest tones.

"Pardon! A Russian, perhaps? Your accent is perfect. I am a Russian." She did not reply.

The day declined, and there was no more conversation. As the train devoured leagues of swampy territory, villages were passed. The journey's end was nearing. Soon meadows were seen surrounding magnificent villas. A wide, shallow river was crossed, the Oxal; Pobloff knew by his pocket map that Nirgiz was nigh. And for the first time in twenty-four hours he sorrowed. Despite his broad invitations and unmistakable hints, he could not trap his travelling companion into an avowal of her identity, of her destination. Nothing could be coaxed from the giant, and it was with a sinking heart—Pobloff was very sentimental—that he saw the lights of Nirgiz; a few minutes later the train entered the Oriental station. In the heat, the clamour of half a thousand voices, yelling unknown jargons, his resolution to keep his companions in view went for naught. Beset by jabbering porters, he did not have an opportunity to say farewell to the veiled lady; with

VISIONARIES

her escort she had disappeared when the car stopped—and without a word of thanks! Pobloff was wretched.

III

It was past nine o'clock as he roamed the vast garden surrounding the Palace of a Thousand Sounds—thus named because of the tiny bells tinkling about its marble dome. He had eaten an unsatisfying meal in a small antechamber, waited upon by a stupid servant. And worse still, the food was ill cooked. On presenting his credentials, earlier in the evening, the grand vizier, a sneaky-appearing man, had welcomed him coldly, telling him that her Serene Highness was too exhausted to receive so late in the day; she had granted too many audiences that afternoon.

"And the prince?" he queried. The prince was away hunting by moonlight, and could not be seen for at least a day. In the interim, Pobloff was told to make himself at home, as became such a distinguished composer and artistic plenipotentiary of Balakia's king. Then he was bowed out of the chamber, down the low malachite staircase, into his supper room. It was all very disturbing to a man of Pobloff's equable disposition.

He thought of Luga, his little wife, his dove; but not long. She did not appeal to his heart of hearts; she was a coquette. Pobloff sighed.

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

He was midway in his mortal life, a dangerous period for susceptible manhood. He lifted moist eyes to the stars; the night was delicious. He rested upon a cushioned couch of stone. About him the moonlight painted the trees, until they seemed like liquefied ermine; the palace arose in pyramidal surges of marble to the sky, meeting the moonbeams as if in friendly defiance, and casting them back to heaven with triumphant reflections. And the stillness, profound as the tomb, was punctuated by glancing fireflies. Pobloff hummed melodiously.

"A night to make music," whispered a deep, sweet voice. Before he could rise, his heart bounding as if stung to its centre, a woman, swathed in white, sat beside him, touched him, put such a pressure upon his shoulder that his blood began to stir. It was she. He stumbled in his speech. She laughed, and he ground his teeth, for this alone saved him from foolishness, from mad behaviour.

"Maestro — you could make music this lovely night?" Pobloff started.

"In God's name, who are you, and what are you doing here? Where did you go this evening? I missed you. Ah! unhappy man that I am, you will drive me crazy!"

She did not smile now, but pressed close to him.

"I am a prisoner — like yourself," she replied simply.

"A prisoner! How a prisoner? I am not a

VISIONARIES

prisoner, but an envoy from my king to the sick princeling."

She sighed.

"The poor, mad prince," she said, "he is in need of your medicine, sadly. He sent for me a year ago, and I am now his prisoner for life."

"But I saw you on the train, a day's journey hence," interrupted the musician.

"Yes, I had escaped, and was being taken back by black Hamet when we met."

Pobloff whistled. So the mystery was disclosed. A little white slave from the seraglio of this embryo tyrant had flown the cage! No wonder she was watched, little surprise that she did not care to eat. He straightened himself, the hair on his round head like porcupine quills.

"My dear young lady," he exclaimed in accents paternal, "leave all to me. If you do not wish to stay in this place, you may rely on me. When I see this same young man,—he must be a nice sprig of royalty!—I propose to tell him what I think of him." Pobloff threw out his chest and snorted with pride. Again he fancied that he heard suppressed laughter. He darted glances in every direction, but the fall of distant waters smote upon his ears like the crepuscular music of Chopin. His companion shook with ill-suppressed emotion. It was some time before she could speak.

"Pobloff," she begged, in her dangerous contralto, a contralto like the medium register of a

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

clarinet, "Pobloff, let me adjure you to be careful. Your coming here has caused political disturbances. The aunt of the prince hates music as much as he adores it. She is no party to your invitation. So be on your guard. Even now there may be spies in the shrubbery." She put her hand on his arm. It was too much. In an instant, despite her feeble struggle, the ardent musician grasped the creature that had tantalized him since morning, and kissed her a dozen times. His head whirled. Pobloff! Pobloff! a voice cried in his brain — and only yesterday you left your Luga, your pretty pigeon, your wife!

The girl was dragged away from him. In the moonshine he saw the grinning Hamet, suspiciously observing him. The runaway stood up and pressed Pobloff's hand desperately, uttering the cry of her forlorn heart: —

"Don't play in the great hall; don't play in that accursed place. You will be asked, but refuse. Make any excuse, but do not set foot on its ebon floors."

He was so confused by the strangeness of this adventure, so confused by the admonition of the unknown when he saw her white draperies disappear, that his jaw fell and his courage wavered. A moment later two oddly caparisoned soldiers, bearing lights, approached, and in the name of her Highness invited him make midnight music in the Palace of a Thousand Sounds.

VISIONARIES

IV

Seated before a Steinway grand pianoforte, an instrument that found its way to this far-away province through the caprice of some artistic potentate, Pobloff nervously preluded. Notwithstanding the warning of the girl, he had allowed himself to be convoyed to the great Hall of Ebony, and there, quite alone, he sat waiting for some cue to begin. None came. He glanced curiously about him. For all the signs of humanity he might as well have been on the heights of Kerb, out among its thorny groves, or in its immemorial forests. He preluded as he gazed around. He could see, by the dim light of two flambeaux set in gold sconces, column after column of blackness receding into inky depths of darkness. A fringe of light encircled his instrument, and beside him was a gallery, so vast that it became a gulf of the infinite at a hundred paces. Now, Pobloff was a brave man. He believed that once upon a time he had peered into strange crevices of space; what novelty could existence hold for him after that shuddering experience? Again he looked into the tenebrous recesses of the hall. He saw nothing, heard nothing.

His fingers went their own way over the keyboard. Finally, following some latent impulse, they began to shape the opening measures of Chopin's Second Ballade, the one of the enigmatic tonalities, sometimes called *The Lake*

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

of the Mermaids. It began with the chanting, childish refrain, a Lithuanian fairy-tale of old, and as its naïve, drowsy, lulling measures — the voices of wicked, wooing sirens — sang and sank in recurrent rhythms, Pobloff heard — this time he was sure — the regular reverberation of distant footsteps. It was as if the monotonous beat of the music were duplicated in some sounding mirror, some mirror that magnified hideously, hideously mimicked the melody. Yet these footfalls murmured as a sea-shell. Every phrase stood out before the pianist, exquisitely clear; his brain had only once before harboured such an exalted mood. There was the expectation of great things coming to pass; dim rumours of an apocalyptic future, when the glory that never was on sea or land should rend the veil of the visible and make clear all that obscures and darkens. The transfiguration which informs the soul of one taken down in epileptic seizure possessed him. Every cranny of his being was flooded with overmastering light — and the faint sound of footsteps marking sinister time to his music, drew closer, closer.

Shaking off an insane desire to join his voice in the immortal choiring of the Cherubim, Pobloff dashed into the passionate storm-scream of the music, and like a pack of phantom bloodhounds the footsteps pressed him in the race. He played as run men from starving wolves in Siberian wastes. To stop would mean — God! what would it mean? These were no mortal

VISIONARIES

steps that crowded upon his sonorous trail. His fingers flew over the keys as he finished the scurrying tempests of tone. Again the first swaying refrain, and Pobloff heard the invisible multitude of feet pause in the night, as if waiting the moment when the Ballade would cease. He quivered; the surprises and terrors were telling upon his well-seasoned nerves.

Still he sped on, fearing the tremendous outburst at the close, where Chopin throws overboard his soul, and with blood-red sails signals the hellish *Willis*, the Lamias of the lake, to his side. Ah, if Pobloff could but thus portion his soul as hostage to the infernal host that now hemmed him in on all sides! Riding over the black and white rocks of his keyboard, he felt as if in the clutches of an unknown force. He discerned death in the distance — death and the unknown horror — and was powerless to resist. Still the galloping of unseen feet, horrible, naked flesh, that clattered and scraped the earth; the panting, hoarse and subdued, of a mighty pack, whose thirst for destruction, for revenge, was unslaked. And always the same trampling of human feet! Were they human? Did not resilient bones tell the tale of brutes viler than men? The glimmering lights seemed cowed, as they sobbed in vacuity and slowly expired.

Pobloff no longer asked himself what it meant; he was become a maniac, pursued by deathless devils. He could have flown to the end of the universe in this Ballade; but, at last, his heart

HALL OF THE MISSING FOOTSTEPS

cracking, head bursting, face livid, overtaken by the Footsteps of the Missing, he smashed both fists upon the keys and fell forward despairingly. . . .

. . . The gigantic, noseless negro, the grand vizier himself, sternly regarded the prince, who stood, torch in hand, near the shattered piano-forte. The dumb spoke:—

“Let us hope, Exalted Highness, that your masquerades and mystifications are over forever. To-day’s prankish sport may put us to trouble for a satisfactory explanation.” He waved his hand vaguely in the direction of the prostrate composer. “And hasheesh sometimes maddens for a lifetime!” He lightly touched the drugged Pobloff with his enormous foot.

The youthful runaway ashamedly lowered his head—in reality he adored music with all the fulness of his cruel, faunlike nature.

XV

THE CURSORY LIGHT

To this day Pinton could never explain why he looked out of that pantry window. He had reached his home in a hungry condition. He was tired and dead broke, so he had resolved to forage. He had listened for two or three, perhaps five, minutes in the hall of his boarding-house; then he went, soft-footed, to Mrs. Hallam's pantry on the second floor. He was sure that it was open, he was equally sure that it contained something edible on its hospitable shelves. Ah! who has not his bread at midnight stolen, ye heavenly powers, ye know him not!

Pinton, however, knew one thing, and that was a ravenous desire to sink his teeth into pie, custard, or even bread. He felt with large, eager hands along the wall on the pantry side. With feverish joy he touched the knob—a friendly knob, despite its cold, distant glaze—of the door he sought.

Pinton gave a tug, and then his heart stopped beating. The door was locked. Something like a curse, something like a prayer, rose to his lips, and his arms fell helplessly to his side.

Mrs. Hallam, realizing that it was Saturday

THE CURSORY LIGHT

night—the predatory night of the week—had secured her pastry, her confitures, her celebrated desserts; and so poor Pinton, all his sweet teeth furiously aching, his mouth watering, stood on the hither side of Paradise, a baffled peri in pantaloons!

After a pause, full of pain and troubrous previsions of a restless, discontented night, Pinton grew angry and pulled at the knob of the door, thinking, perhaps, that it might abate a jot of its dignified resistance. It remained immovable, grimly antagonistic, until his fingers grew hot and cold as they touched a bit of cold metal.

The key in the lock! In a second it was turned, and the hungry one was within and restlessly searching and fumbling for food. He felt along the lower shelves and met apples, oranges, and sealed bottles containing ruined, otherwise miscalled preserved, fruit. He knelt on the dresser and explored the upper shelf. Ah, here was richness indeed! Pies, pies, cakes, pies, frosted cakes, cakes sweating golden, fruity promises, and cakes as icy as the hand of charity. Pinton was happy, glutton that he was, and he soon filled the pockets of his overcoat. What Mrs. Hallam might say in the morning he cared not. Let the galled jade wince, his breakfast appetite would be unwrung; and then he started violently, lost his balance, and almost fell to the floor.

Opposite him was the window of the pantry, which faced the wall of the next house. Pinton

VISIONARIES

had never been in the pantry by daylight, so he was rudely shocked by the glance of a light—a cursory, moving light. It showed him a window in the other house and a pair of stairs. It flickered about an old baluster and a rusty carpet, it came from below, it mounted upward and was lost to view.

The burglar of pies, the ravisher of cakes, was almost shocked by this unexpected light. He watched it dancing fantastically on the discoloured wall of the house; he wondered—ill at ease—if it would flash in his face. His surmise was realized, for a streak of illumination reached the narrow chamber in which he cowered, and then he was certain some one was looking at him. He never budged, for he was too frightened. Suddenly the light vanished and a head was dimly silhouetted in the window opposite. It nodded to Pinton. Pinton stared stupidly, and the head disappeared. The hungry man, his appetite now gone, was numb and terrified.

What did it mean, who was the man? A detective, or a friend of Mrs. Hallam's in a coign from which the plunderers of her pantry could be noted? Beady repentance stood out on Pinton's forehead.

And the light came back. This time it was intelligible, for it was a lantern in the hand of a young man of about thirty. His face was open and smiling. He wore his hair rather long for an American, and it was blond and curling.

THE CURSORY LIGHT

He surveyed Pinton for a moment, then he said, in a most agreeable voice :—

“ What luck, old pal ? ”

Pinton dropped his pies, slammed the window, and got to his bedroom as fast as his nervous legs could carry him. He undressed in a nightmare, and did not sleep until the early summer sun shot hot shafts of heat into his chamber.

With a shamed Sabbath face he arose, dressed, and descended to his morning meal. Mrs. Hallam was sitting in orotund silence, but seemed in good humour. She asked him casually if he had enjoyed his Saturday evening, and quite as casually damned the wandering cats that had played havoc in her pantry. She remarked that leaving windows open was a poor practice, even if hospitable in appearance, and nervous Mr. Pinton drank his coffee in silent assent and then hurried off to the church where he trod the organ pedals for a small salary's sake.

The following Friday was rehearsal night, and the organist left his choir in a bad humour. His contralto had not attended, and as she was the only artiste and the only good-looking girl of the lot, Pinton took it into his head to become jealous. She had not paid the slightest attention to him, so he could not attribute her absence to a personal slight; but he felt aggrieved and vaguely irritated.

Pinton's musicianship was not profound. He had begun life as an organ salesman. He ma-

VISIONARIES

nipulated the cabinet organ for impossible customers in Wisconsin, and he came to New York because he was offered a better chance.

The inevitable church position occurred. Then came Zundel voluntaries and hard pedal practice. At last Mendelssohn's organ sonatas were reached and with them a call—organists, like pastors, have calls—to a fashionable church. The salary was fair and Mr. Pinton grew side-whiskers.

He heard Paderewski play Chopin, and became a crazy lover of the piano. He hired a small upright and studied finger exercises. He consulted a thousand books on technic, and in the meantime could not play Czerny's velocity studies.

He grew thin, and sought the advice of many pianists. He soon found that pressing your foot on the swell and pulling couplers for tone colour were not the slightest use in piano playing. Subtle finger pressures, the unloosening of the muscles, the delicate art of *nuance*, the art unfelt by many organists, all were demanded of the pianist, and Pinton almost despaired.

He grew contemptuous of the king of instruments as he essayed the C major invention of Bach. He sneered at stops and pedals, and believed, in his foolish way, that all polyphony was bound within the boards of the Well-Tempered Clavichord. Then the new alto came to the choir, and Pinton—it being springtide, when the blood is in the joyful mood—thought that he was in love. He was really athirst.

THE CURSORY LIGHT

This Friday evening he was genuinely disappointed and thirsty. He turned with a sinking heart and parched throat into Pop Pusch's dearly beloved resort. Earlier in his life he had often solaced himself with the free lunch that John, the melancholy waiter, had dispensed. Pinton's mind was a prey to many emotions as he entered the famous old place. He sat down before a brown table and clamoured for amber beer.

He was not alone at the table. As Pinton put the glass of Pilsner to his lips he met the gaze of two sardonic eyes. He could not finish his glass. He returned the look of the other man and then arose, with a nervous jerk that almost upset the table.

"Sit down, old pal; don't be crazy. I'll never say a word. Sit down, you fool; don't you see people are looking at you?"

The voice was low, kindly in intonation, but it went through Pinton like a saw biting its way into wood.

He sat down all in a heap. He knew the eyes; he knew the voice. It was the owner of the dark lantern—the mysterious man in the other house of that last Saturday night. Pinton felt as if he were about to become ill.

"Lord, but you are a nervous one!" said the other, most reassuringly. "Sit still and I'll order brandy. It will settle your stomach."

That brought Pinton to his senses at once.

"No, no, I'll be all right in a moment," he

VISIONARIES

said rather huskily. "I never drink spirits. Thank you, all the same."

"Don't mention it," said the man, and he tossed off his Würzburger. Each man stealthily regarded the other. Pinton saw the stranger of the lantern and staircase. Close by he was handsome and engaging. His hair was worn like a violin virtuoso's, and his hands were white, delicate, and well cared for. He spoke first.

"How did you make out on that job?— I don't fancy there was much in it. Boarding-houses, you know!"

Pinton, every particle of colour leaving his flabby face, asked:—

"What job?"

The stranger looked at him keenly and went on rather ironically:—

"You are the most nervous duck I ever ran across. When I saw you last your pocket was full of the silver plate of that pantry, and I can thank you for a fright myself, for when I saw you, I was just getting ready to crack a neat little crib. Say! why didn't you flash your glim at me or make some friendly signal at least? You popped out of sight like a prairie rabbit when a coyote heaves in view."

Pinton felt the ground heave beneath him. What possible job could the man mean? What was a "glim," and what did the fellow suggest by silver plate? Then it struck him all of a sudden. Heavens! he was taken for a burglar

THE CURSORY LIGHT

by a burglar. His presence in the pie pantry had been misinterpreted by a cracksmen; and he, the harmless organist of Dr. Bulgerly's church, was claimed as the associate of a dangerous, perhaps notorious, thief. Pinton's cup of woe overflowed.

He arose, put on his hat, and started to go. The young man grasped his arm, and said in a most conciliatory fashion :—

“Perhaps I have hurt your sensitive nature. It was far from my intention to do so. I saluted you at first in the coarse, conventional manner which is expected by members of our ancient and honourable craft, and if I have offended you, I humbly beg your pardon.”

His accent was that of a cultivated gentleman. Pinton, somewhat assured, dropped back in his seat, and, John passing by just then, more beer was ordered.

“Hear me before you condemn me,” said the odd young man. “My name is Blastion and I am a burglar by profession. When I saw you the other night, at work on the premises next door to me, I was struck by your refined face. I said to myself: ‘At last the profession is being recruited by gentlemen, men of culture, men of refinement. At last a profitable, withal risky, pursuit is being dignified, nay, graced, by the proper sort of person.’ And I saluted you in a happy, haphazard fashion, and then you flew the coop. Pardon my relapse into the vernacular.”

Pinton felt that it was time to speak.

VISIONARIES

"Pardon me, if I interrupt you, Mr. Blastion; but I fear we are not meeting on equal ground. You take me for a — for a man of your profession. Indeed, sir, you are mistaken. When you discovered me last Saturday night I was in the pantry of Mrs. Hallam, my boarding-house keeper, searching for pie. I am not a burglar — pardon my harsh expression; I am, instead, an organist by profession."

The pallor of the burglar's countenance testified to the gravity of his feeling. He stared and blushed, looked apprehensively at the various groups of domino players in the back room, then, pulling himself together, he beckoned to melancholy John, and said : —

"Johann, two more beers, please. Yes?"

Pinton became interested. There was something appealing in the signal the man flashed from his eyes when he realized that he had unbosomed himself to a perfect stranger, and not to a member of his beloved guild. The organist put his hand on the man's arm and said — faint memories of flatulent discourses from the Reverend Bulgerly coming to his aid: "Be not alarmed, my friend. I will not betray you. I am a musician, but I respect art ever, even when it reveals itself in manifold guises."

Pinton felt that he was a man of address, a fellow of some wit; his confidential and rather patronizing pose moved his companion, who slyly grimaced.

"So you are an organist and not a member of

THE CURSORY LIGHT

the noble Knights of the Centrebit and Jimmy?" he asked rather sarcastically.

"Yes," admitted Pinton, "I am an organist, and an organist who would fain become a pianist." The other started.

"I am a pianist myself, and yet I cannot say that I would like to play the organ."

"You are a pianist?" said Pinton, in a puzzled voice.

"Well, why not? I studied in Paris, and I suppose my piano technic stood me in good stead in my newer profession. Just look at my hands if you doubt my word."

Aghast, the organist examined the shapely hands before him. Without peradventure of a doubt they were those of a pianist, an expert pianist, and one who had studied assiduously. He was stupefied. A burglar and a pianist! What next?

Mr. Blastion continued his edifying remarks: "Yes, I studied very hard. I was born in the Southwest, and went to Paris quite young. I had good fingers and was deft at sleight-of-hand tricks. I could steal a handkerchief from a rabbi — which is saying volumes — and I played all the Chopin études before I was fifteen. At twenty-one I knew twenty-five concertos from memory, and my great piece was the *Don Juan Fantasy*. Oh, I was a wonder! When Liszt paid his last visit to Paris I played before him at the warerooms of the Pleyels.

"Monsieur Théodore Ritter was anxious for his

VISIONARIES

old master to hear such a pupil. I assure you there must be some congenital twist of evil in me, for I couldn't for the life of me forbear picking the old fellow's pockets and lifting his watch. Now don't look scandalized, Mr. — eh? Oh! thank you very much, Mr. Pinton. If you are born that way, all the punishments and preachments—excuse the alliteration—will not stand in your way as a warning. I have done time—I mean I have served several terms of imprisonment, but luckily not for a long period. I suffered most by my incarceration in not having a piano. Not even a dumb keyboard was allowed, and I practised the Jackson finger exercises in the air and thus kept my fingers limber. On Saturdays the warden allowed me, as a special favour, to practise on the cabinet organ—an odious instrument—so as to enable me to play on Sundays in chapel. Of course no practice was needed for the wretched music we poor devils howled once a week, but I gained one afternoon in seven for study by my ruse.

"Oh, the joy of feeling the ivory—or bone—under my expectant fingers! I played all the Chopin, Henselt, and Liszt études on the miserable keybóard of the organ. Yes, of course, without wind. It was, I assure you, a truly spiritual consolation. You can readily imagine if a man has been in the habit of practising all day, even if he does 'burgle' at night, that to be suddenly deprived of all instrumental resources is a bitter blow."

THE CURSORY LIGHT

Pinton stuttered out an affirmative response. Then both arose after paying their checks, and the organist shook the burglar's hand at the corner, after first exacting a promise that Blastion should play for him some morning.

"With pleasure, my boy. You're a gentleman and an artist, and I trust you absolutely." And he walked away, whistling with rare skill the D flat valse of Chopin.

"You can trust me, I swear!" Pinton called after him, and then went unsteadily homeward, full of generous resolves and pianistic ambitions. As he intermittently undressed he discovered, to his rage and amazement, that both his purse and watch had disappeared. The one was well filled; the other, gold. Blastion's technic had proved unimpeachable.

XVI

AN IRON FAN

EFFINGHAME waited for Dr. Arn in the study, a small chamber crowded with the contents of the universe—so it seemed to the visitor. There was a table unusual in size, indeed, big enough to dissect a body thereon. It was littered with books and medical publications and was not very attractive. The walls were covered with original drawings of famous Japanese masters, and over the fireplace hung a huge fan, dull gray in colouring, with long sandalwood spokes. Not a noteworthy example of Japanese art, thought Effingham, as he glanced without marked curiosity at its neutral tinting, though he could not help wondering why the cunning artificers of the East had failed to adorn the wedge-shaped surfaces of this fan with their accustomed bold and exquisite arabesques.

He impatiently paced the floor. His friend had told him to come at nine o'clock in the evening. It was nearly ten. Then he began to finger things. He fumbled the papers in the desk. He examined the two Japanese swords — light as ivory, keen as razors. He stared at each of the prints, at Hokusai, Toyokimi, Kuni-

AN IRON FAN

yoshi, Kiyonaga, Kiosai, Hiroshige, Utamaro, Oukoyo-Yé,—the doctor's taste was Oriental. And again he fell to scrutinizing the fan. It was large, ugly, clumsy. What possessed Arn to place such a sprawling affair over his mantel? Tempted to touch it, he discovered that it was as silky as a young bat's wing. At last, his curiosity excited, he lifted it with some straining to the floor. What puzzled him was its weight. He felt its thin ribs, its soft, paper-like material, and his fingers chilled as they closed on the two outermost spokes. They were of metal, whether steel or iron he could not determine. A queer fan this, far too heavy to stir the air, and —

Effingham held the fan up to the light. He had perceived a shadowy figure in a corner. It resolved itself into a man's head — bearded, scowling, crowned with thorns or sunbeams. It was probably a Krishna. But how came such a face on a Japanese fan? The type was Oriental, though not Mongolian, rather Semitic. It vaguely recalled to Effingham a head and face he had seen in a famous painting. But where and by whom? It wore a vile expression, the eyes mean and revengeful; there was a cruel mouth and a long, hooked, crafty nose. The forehead was lofty, even intellectual, and bore its thorns — yes, he was sure they were thorns — like a conqueror. Just then Dr. Arn entered and laughed when he saw the other struggling with the fan.

VISIONARIES

"My *Samurai* fan!" he exclaimed, in his accustomed frank tones; "how did you discover it so soon?"

"You've kept me here an hour. I had to do something," answered the other, sulkily.

"There, there, I apologize. Sit down, old man. I had a very sick patient to-night, and I feel worn out. I'll ring for champagne." They talked about trifling personal matters, when suddenly Effingham asked:—

"Why *Samurai*? I had supposed this once belonged to some prehistoric giant who could waft it as do ladies their bamboo fans, when they brush the dust from old hearts—as the Spanish poet sang."

"That fan is interesting enough," was the doctor's reply. "When a *Samurai*, one of the warrior caste Japanese, was invited to the house of a doubtful friend, he carried this fan as a weapon of defence. Compelled to leave his two swords behind a screen, he could close this fighting machine and parry the attack of his hospitable enemy until he reached his swords. Just try it and see what a formidable weapon it would prove." He took up the fan, shut it, and swung it over his head.

"Look out for the bottles!" cried Effingham.

"Never fear, old chap. And did you notice the head?"

"That's what most puzzled me."

"No wonder. I too was puzzled—until I found the solution. And it took me some years

AN IRON FAN

—yes, all the time you were in Paris learning how to paint and live.” He paused, and his face became gloomy.

“Well — well?”

“There is no well. It’s a damned bad fan, that iron one, and I don’t mind saying so to you.”

“Superstitious — you! Where is your Haeckel, your Wundt, your Weismann? Do you still believe in the infallibility of the germ-plasm? Has the fan brought you ill-luck? The fact is, Arn, ever since your return from China you’ve been a strange bird!” It was Effingham’s turn to laugh.

“Don’t say another word.” The doctor was vivacious in a moment and poured out wine. They both lighted cigars. Slowly puffing, Arn took up the fan and spread it open.

“See here! That head, as you must have noticed, is not Japanese. It’s Jewish. Do you recall the head of Judas painted by Da Vinci in his Last Supper? Now isn’t this old scoundrel’s the exact duplicate — well, if not exact, there is a very strong resemblance.” Effingham looked and nodded.

“And what the devil is it doing on a fan of the *Samurai*? It’s not caprice. No Japanese artist ever painted in that style or ever expressed that type. I thought the thing out and came to the conclusion —”

“Yes — yes! What conclusion?” eagerly interrupted his listener.

VISIONARIES

"To the conclusion that I could never unravel such a knotty question alone." Effingham was disappointed.

"So I had recourse to an ally — to the fan itself," blandly added Arn, as he poured out more wine.

"The fan?"

"Precisely — the fan. I studied it from tip to tip, as our bird-shooting friends say, and I, at last, discovered more than a picture. You know I am an Orientalist. When I was at Johns Hopkins University I attended the classes of the erudite Blumenfeld, and what you can't learn from him — need I say any more? One evening I held the fan in front of a vivid electric light and at once noticed serried lines. These I deciphered after a long time. Another surprise. They were Chinese characters of a remotely early date — Heaven knows how many dynasties back! Now what, you will ask, is Chinese doing on a *Samurai* fighting fan! I don't know. I never shall know. But I do know that this fan contains on one side of it the most extraordinary revelation ever vouchsafed mankind, particularly Christian mankind." Excited by his own words, Arn arose.

"Effingham, my dear fellow, I know you have read Renan. If Renan had seen the communication on this iron fan, he would have never written his life of the Messiah." His eyes blazed.

"Why, what do you mean?"

AN IRON FAN

"I mean that it might have been a life of Judas Iscariot."

"Good God, man, are you joking?" ejaculated Effingham.

"I mean," sternly pursued Arn, "that if De Quincey had studied this identical fan, the opium-eater would have composed another gorgeous rhetorical plea for the man preëlected to betray his Saviour, the apostle who spilt the salt." He sat down and breathed heavily.

"Go on! Go on!"

"Shall I relate the history upon the fan?" And without waiting for an answer he began at the left of the fan and slowly read to the right:—

I who write this am called Moâ the Bonze. What I write of I witnessed in a walled city of Judea. I travelled there attracted by the report of miraculous happenings brought about by the magic art of a youthful barbarian called Ieshua. The day I arrived in the city they had sentenced the wise man to death by crucifixion. I was disappointed. I had come many moons and many leagues from the Yellow Kingdom to see something rare. I was too late. The magician, whom his disciples called a god, had been executed. I tarried a few days in the city. After many questions put to beggars and outcasts, I heard that a certain woman of rank had a portrait of Ieshua. I called and without hesitation asked her to show me this picture. She was an exalted soul. She wept bitter tears as she drew

VISIONARIES

from a secret cabinet a scarf upon which was imprinted a bloody image. She continued to weep as I made a copy of the head. I confess I was not impressed. The face was bearded and ugly. The new god was said to have been as fair as the sun. And I told the woman this. She only wept the more.

"If he were a god," I asked, "where are outward evidences?" She became frantic.

"The real man!" she cried; "*this* one died for the man he betrayed," and again fell to lamenting. Seeing I could gain nothing more from her, I left, wondering at the strange heretics I had encountered. I went back to my country and after weaving this tale and painting the head, there awaited the fifth Buddha, the successor to Siddartha, whose coming has been predicted.

Arn's voice ceased. There was silence in the chamber. Then Effingham started up and fiercely growled:—

"What do *you* make of it, Arn?"

"Isn't it clear enough? There's been a frightful error somewhere, one of incalculable consequences. A tremendous act of heroism has been committed by a man whose name has been universally execrated through the ages. Perhaps he repented at the eleventh hour and by some means impersonated his betrayed friend; perhaps—"

"But that *other* body found in the blasted

AN IRON FAN

field of Aceldama!" demanded the agitated Effingham. Dr. Arn did not answer.

After a lugubrious pause, he whispered:—

"There's more to follow. You haven't heard the worst."

"What—more! I thought your damnable old Bonze died in the odour of sanctity over there in his Yellow Kingdom."

"True. He died. But before he died he recorded a vision he had. It is inscribed on the other side of the fan."

Effingham's features lengthened.

"Still the same fan."

"The same. Here is what it prophesies." Reversing the clumsy fan, Arn again read:—

Before I pass over into Nirvana I must relate what I saw in the country of the Christians. It was not a dream. It was too real. And yet it is to be, for it has not yet happened. The Campagna was now become a shallow lake from the sea almost to the Sabine Mountains. What had been Rome was a black waste spot, full of stones and weeds. And no two stones stood together. Ah! our war with the white races had been successful. We had not used their fighting machines, as did that nation of little brown men, the Japanese. The Chinese were too sage. They allowed the Christians to exterminate the Japanese; but when they attacked us and attempted to rob us of our land, we merely resorted to our old-time weapon—the Odour-Death.

VISIONARIES

With it we smothered their armies, sunk their navies, swept through their countries like the simoon. The awful secret of the Odour-Death is one that has been ours from the beginning of time. Known only to the College of Bonzes, it was never used except in extreme peril. Its smell is more revolting in its consequences than the Black Plague. It ravaged the earth.

I sat in a flat-bottomed boat, enjoying the soft melancholy Italian evening. Not a human did I see; nor had I encountered one on my slow voyage from the Middle Seas. In meditation I pondered the ultimate wisdom of Confucius and smiled at the folly of the white barbarians who had tried to show us a new god, a new religion. At last they, too, had succumbed like the nations before their era. The temple of Jupiter on the Capitol had fallen, so had the holy temple of Jerusalem. And now St. Peter's. Their central religion had been destroyed, and yet prophecies of the second coming of their divinity had not been accomplished. When the last Pope of Rome dies, so it was said, then time would be accomplished. The last Pope *had* died. Their basilica with its mighty dome was a desert where scorpions and snakes abounded. The fifth Buddha would appear, not the second Christos. Suddenly I saw before me in a puny boat a beautiful beardless youth. He was attired in some symbolical garments and upon his head a triple tiara. I could not believe my aged eyes. He sat upright. His attitude was

AN IRON FAN

hieratic. His eyes were lifted heavenwards. He clasped his hands and prayed:—

“O Lord, remove thy servant. The time is at hand foretold by thy slaughtered saints. I am the last Pope and the humblest of thy servants. Though the heathen hath triumphed upon the earth, I go to thy bosom, for all things are now accomplished.” And he tumbled forward, dead. The last Pope! I had seen him. Nothing could happen after that.

And as I turned my boat in the direction of the sea a moaning came upon the waters. The sky became as brass. A roar, like the rending asunder of the firmament, caused my soul to expand with horror and joy. Yes, time *was* accomplished. The last Pope had uttered the truth. Eternity was nigh. But the Buddha would now prove to the multitudes awakened from their long sleep that *He*, not other gods, was the true, the only God. In a flare of light sounded the trumpets of destiny; eternity unrolled before me, and on the vast plain I saw the bones of the buried dead uniting, as men and women from time’s beginnings arose in an army, the number whereof is unthinkable. And oh! abomination of desolation, the White Horse, not *Kalki* the tenth incarnation of Vishnu, but the animal foretold in *their* Apocalypse, came through the lightnings, and in the whirlwinds of flame and thunder I saw the shining face of Him, the Son of Man! Where our Buddha? Alas! the last Pope spake truth. I, Moâ the Bonze, tell

VISIONARIES

you this ere it be too late to repent your sins
and forswear your false gods. The Galilean is
our master. . . .

“Faneur! Do you know what I would do
with that accursed fan? I'd destroy it, sell it,
get rid of it somehow. Or else —” Effing-
hame scrutinized the doctor, whose eyes were
closed — “or else I would return to the pious
practices of my old religion.” No smile crossed
the face of his friend as he firmly held the
Samurai.

XVII

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

I

WHEN Marco Davos left Ischl on the midday train, that picturesque, huddled Austrian watering-place was stuffy. He was surprised then most pleasantly by the coolness of Aussee, further down the line in the direction of Vienna. Ischl is not a bad place, but it lies, as the natives say, smothered in a kettle. He rode over from the station to the stadt park, where the band was playing. There he dismounted, for he was going further — Aussee is not very interesting, but it principally serves as a good starting-point for trips to many of the charming lakes with which Styria is dotted. After asking his way, Davos passed the swimming baths, and keeping on the left bank of a tiny stream, he presently found himself walking through an earthly paradise. Since his advent in Ischl, where he drank the waters and endeavoured to quiet his overtaxed nerves, he had made up his mind to visit Alt-Aussee; several Viennese friends had assured him that this hamlet, beneath a terrific precipice

VISIONARIES

and on the borders of a fairy-like lake, would be well worth the while.

It was a relief to breathe the thinner mountain air, and the young artist inhaled it with satisfaction, his big hat in hand, his long curly black hair flowing in the gentle breeze. He found himself in tunnels of verdure, the sunlight shut off by the heavy leafage; then the path debouched into the open and, skirting closely the rocky wall, it widened into an island of green where a shady pagoda invited. He sat down for a few minutes and congratulated himself that he had escaped the intimate discomforts of the omnibus he discerned on the opposite bank, packed with stout people. This was the third week of his vacation, one enforced by a nerve specialist in the Austrian capital, and for the first time Davos felt almost cheerful. Perhaps the absolute hush of the country and the purity of the atmosphere, with its suggestion of recent rain,—the skies weep at least once a day in the Salzkammergut region,—proved a welcome foil to fashionable Ischl, with its crowds, its stiffness, its court ceremonial—for the emperor enjoys his *villettiatura* there. And Davos was sick and irritable after a prolonged musical season. He had studied the pianoforte with Rosenthal, and his success, from his *début*, had been so unequivocal that he played too much in public. There was a fiery particle in his interpretations of Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt that proclaimed the temperament, if not the actual

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

possession, of genius. Still in his early manhood — he was only twenty — the maturity of his musical intelligence and the poetry of his style created havoc in impressionable hearts. With his mixed blood, Hungarian and Italian, Marco Davos' performance of romantic composers was irresistible ; in it there was something of Pachmann's wayward grace and Paderewski's plangency, but with an added infusion of gypsy wildness which evoked for old concert-goers memories of Liszt the brilliant rhapsodist.

But he soon overpaid the score presented by the goddess Fortune — his nerves were sadly jangled. A horror of the human face obsessed his waking and sleeping hours ; he dreamed of colossal countenances with threatening eyes, a vast composite of the audiences he nightly faced. As his popularity increased the waning of his self-respect told him that he must go into retreat, anywhere out of the musical world — else would his art suffer. It did suffer. The nervous diffidence, called stage-fright, which had never assailed his supreme self-balance, intruded its unwelcome presence. Marco, several months after he had discovered all these mischievous symptoms, the maladies of artistic adolescence, was not assured when the critics hinted of them — the public would surely follow suit in a few weeks. Then came the visit to the learned Viennese doctor and the trip to Ischl. A few more months of this appalling absorption in his own personality, this morbid marriage of man to

VISIONARIES

his own image, and he suspected that his brain would be irretrievably injured.

He was a curious student of matters psychologic as well as musical. A friendly laboratory had inducted him into many biologic mysteries. Particularly fascinating to him was the tactile sense, that sense of touch where-with man acquaints himself with this earth-clot swimming in space. Davos contemplated the tips of his fingers as he sat in the grateful cool, his ten voices as he named them. With them he sang, thundered, and thought upon the keyboard of his grand piano-forte. A miracle, indeed, these slender cushions of fat, ramified by a network of nerves, sinews, and bones as exquisite in their mechanism as the motion of the planets. If hearing is a miracle, so is touch; the ear is not a resonator, as has been so long maintained, but an apparatus which records variations of pressure. This makes it subservient to the laws of sensation; touch and hearing are akin. It aroused the pride of Davos after he had read the revolutionary theories of Pierre Bounier regarding the touch. So subtle could the art of touch be cultivated, the pianist believed, that the blind could *feel* colour on the canvas of the painter. He spent weeks experimenting with a sensitive manometer, gauging all the scale of dynamics. No doubt these fumblings on the edge of a new science temporarily hurt his play. With a dangerous joy he pressed the keys of his instru-

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

ment, endeavouring to achieve more delicate shadings. He quarrelled with the piano manufacturers for their obstinate adherence to the old-fashioned clumsy action ; everything had been improved but the keyboard—that alone was as coldly unresponsive and inelastic as a half-century ago. He had fugitive dreams of wires that would vibrate like a violin. The sounding-board of a pianoforte is too far from the pianist, while the violinist presses his strings as one kisses the beloved. Little wonder it is the musical monarch. A new pianoforte, with passionately coloured overtones, that could sob like a violoncello, sing like a violin, and resound with the brazen clangours of the orchestra—Liszt had conceived this synthesis, had by the sheer force of his audacious genius compelled from his instrument ravishing tones that were never heard before or — alas ! — since.

Even the antique harpsichord had its compensations ; not so powerful in its tonal capacity, it nevertheless gave forth a pleading, human quality like the still small angelic voice. Davos pondered these problems, pondered Chopin's celestial touch and the weaving magic of his many-hued poems ; Chopin—Keats, Shelley, and Heine battling within the walls of a frail tender soul.

The sound of footsteps and voices aroused him. He shivered with disgust. More people ! Two men, well advanced in life, followed by two women, barely attracted his notice, until he saw

VISIONARIES

that the little creature who waddled at the rear of the party was a Japanese in European clothes. Notwithstanding her western garb, she resembled a print of Utamaro. Beside her walked a tall, grave girl, with dark hair and gray eyes, attired in the quaint garb of some early nineteenth-century epoch — 1840 or thereabouts. As old-fashioned as she looked, a delicate girlish beauty was hers, and when she indifferently gazed at Davos, straightway he heard humming in his head the "glance motive" from *Tristan and Isolde*. They passed on, but not leaving him as he was before; a voice whispered in the secret recesses of his being: "You love! Follow! Seek her!" And under the sudden impulsion of this passion he arose and made a few steps toward the curve of the path around which the girl and her companions had disappeared. The absurdity of this hasty translation into action of his desire halted him. Yes, his nerves must be in a bad way if a casual encounter with a pretty woman — but was she pretty? He did not return to his seat. He continued his stroll leisurely. Pretty! Not exactly pretty — distinguished! Noble! Lovely! Beautiful! He smiled. Here he was playing the praises of the unknown in double octaves. He did not overtake her. She had vanished on the other side of the bridge, and in a few minutes he found himself entering Alt-Aussee. It wore a bright appearance, with its various-coloured villas on the lake shores, and its church

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

and inn for a core. The garden of this hotel he found to be larger than he had imagined; it stretched along the bank and only stopped as if stone and mortar had been too lazy to go farther.

Again he hesitated. The garden, the *restau-
ration* — full of people: women knitting, chil-
dren bawling, men reading; and all sipping
coffee to a background of gossip. He remem-
bered that it was the sacred hour of *Kaffee-
klatsch*, and he would have escaped by a flight
of steps that led down to the beach, but he was
hailed. A company of a half-dozen sat at a
large table under the trees, and the host was
an orchestral conductor well known to Davos.
There was no alternative. He took a chair.
He was introduced as the celebrated pianoforte-
virtuoso to men and women he had never seen
before, and hoped — so rancorous was his mood
— never to see again. A red-headed girl from
Brooklyn, who confessed that she thought
Maeterlinck the name of some new Parisian
wickedness, further bothered him with questions
about piano teachers. No, he didn't give les-
sons! He never would! She dropped out of
the conversation. Finally by an effort he swore
that his head was splitting, that he must return
to Ischl. He broke away. When he discovered
that the crowd was also bound for the same place,
he abruptly disappeared. It took him just two
hours to traverse the irregular curves of the lake
on the Franz Carl Promenade, and he ate his

VISIONARIES

dinner in peace at the inn upon a balcony that projected over the icy waters.

Davos decided, as he smoked a mild cigarette, that he would remain at Alt-Aussee for the night. The peace of the landscape purified his soul of its irritability, though he wished that the Dachstein would not dominate so persistently the skyline—it was difficult to avoid the view of this solitary and egotistic peak, the highest in Styria. He was assigned a comfortable chamber, but the night was too fine for bed. He did not feel sleepy, and he went along the road he had come by; the church was an opaque mass, the spire alone showing in the violet twilight, like some supernatural spar on a ship far out at sea. He attempted to conjure to his tired brain the features, the expression, of the girl. They would not reappear; his memory was traitorous.

The murmur of faint music, piano music, made his ears wince — how he hated music! But afar as were these tonal silhouettes, traced against the evening air, his practised hearing told him that they were made by an artist. He languidly followed the clue, and soon he was at the gate of a villa, almost buried in the bosk, and listening with all his critical attention to a thrilling performance — yes, thrilling was the word — of Chopin's music. What! The last movement of the B flat minor sonata, the funeral march sonata, but no more like the interpretation he had heard from others — from himself — than — than . . .

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

But, good heavens! *Who* was playing! The unison passages that mount and recede were iridescent columns of mist painted by the moonlight and swaying rhythmically in the breeze. Here was something rare. No longer conscious of the technical side of the playing, so spiritualized was it, so crystalline the touch, Davos forgot his manners and slipped through the gateway, through the dark garden, toward an open window in which burned a solitary candle. The mystery of this window and the quicksilver dartings of the music—gods, what a touch, what gossamer delicacy!—set his heart throb-bing. He forgot his sick nerves. When the trumpet blows, the war-horse lusts for action—and this was not a trumpet, but a horn of elf-land. He moved as closely as he dared to the window, and the music ceased—naturally enough, the movement had concluded. His ears burned with the silence. *She* came to the window. Arrested by the vision—the casement framed her in a delicious manner—he did not stir. She could not help seeing this intruder, the light struck him full in the face. She spoke:—

“Dear Mr. Davos, won’t you come into the house? My father and my uncle will be most happy to receive you.”

* * * * *

She knew him! Stunned by his overstrung emotions, he could only bow his head.

VISIONARIES

II

He received the welcome of a king. The two men he had seen earlier in the day advanced ceremoniously and informed him that the honour of his presence was something they had never hoped for; that—as news flies swiftly in villages—they had heard he was at Alt-Aussee; they had recognized the *great* Marco Davos on the road. These statements were delivered with exaggerated courtesy, though possibly sincere. The elder of the pair was white-whiskered, very tall and spare, his expression a sadly vague one. It was her father. The other an antique person, a roly-poly fellow who chuckled and quavered, was her uncle. Davos sat in a drawing-room containing a grand pianoforte, a few chairs, and couches. The floor was stained, and when a cluster of lights was brought by the uncle, he noticed that only Chopin portraits hung on the walls. He apologized for his intrusion—the music had lured him from the highroad.

“We are very musical,” said the father.

“I should say so,” reiterated his brother-in-law.

“Musical!” echoed Davos. “Do you call it by such an everyday phrase? I heard the playing of a marvellous poet a moment ago.” The two men looked shyly at each other. She entered. He was formally presented.

“Monsieur Davos, this is Constantia Grabowska, my daughter. My name is Joseph

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

Grabowski; my late wife's brother, Monsieur Pelletier." Davos was puzzled by the name, Constantia Grabowska! She sat before him, dressed in black silk with crinoline; two dainty curls hung over her ears; her profile, her colouring, were slightly Oriental, and in her nebulous gray eyes with their greenish light there was eternal youth. Constantia! Polish. And how she played Chopin — ah! it came to him before he had finished his apologies.

"You are named after Chopin's first love," he ejaculated. "Pardon the liberty." She answered him in her grave, measured contralto.

"Constantia Gladowska was my grandmother." The playing, the portraits, were now explained. A lover of the Polish composer, Davos knew every incident of his biography.

"I am the son of that Joseph Grabowski, the Warsaw merchant who married the soprano singer, Constantia Gladowska, in 1832," said the father, smilingly. "My father became blind."

"Chopin's *Ideal!*!" exclaimed Marco. He was under the spell of the girl's beauty and music. He almost stared at her, for the knowledge that she was a great artiste, perhaps greater than himself, rather dampened his passion. She was adorable as she returned without coquetry his ardent gaze; but she was — he had to admit it — a rival. This composite feeling he inwardly wrestled with as the conversation placidly proceeded. They only spoke of

VISIONARIES

Poland, of Chopin. Once the name of Emilia Plater, the Polish Joan of Arc, was mentioned — she, too, was a distant connection. The young pianist hinted that more music would be agreeable, but there was no response. He was quite alone with Constantia, and they talked of Poland's tone-poet. She knew much more of Chopin than he did, and she recited Mickiewicz's patriotic poems with incomparable verve.

"Do you believe in heredity?" he cried, as the father entered with the tea. "Do you believe that your love of Chopin is inherited? Chopin composed that wonderful slow movement of the F minor concerto because of his love for your grandmother. How I wish I could have seen her, heard her."

The girl, without answering him, detached from her neck a large brooch and chain. Davos took it and amazedly compared the portrait with the living woman.

"You *are* Constantia Gladowska." She smiled.

"Her love of Chopin — she must have loved her youthful adorer — has been transmitted to you. Oh, please play me that movement again, the one Rubinstein called 'the night wind sweeping over the churchyard graves.'" Constantia blushed so deeply that he knew he had offended her. She had for him something of the pathos of old dance music — its stately sweetness, its measured rhythms. After

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

drinking a cup of tea he drifted to the instrument—flies do not hanker after honey as strongly as do pianists in the presence of an open keyboard. A tactful silence ensued. He began playing, and, as if exasperated at the challenge implied by her refusal, he played in his old form. Then he took the theme of Chopin's E flat minor Scherzo, and he juggled with it, spun it into fine fibres of tone, dashed it down yawning and serried harmonic abysses. He was magnificent as he put forth all the varied resources of his art. Constantia, her cheeks ablaze, her lips parted, interposed a fan between her eyes and the light. There was something dangerous and passionate in her regard. In all the fury of his play he knew that he had touched her. Once, during a pause, he heard her sigh. As he finished in a thunderous crash he saw in the doorway the figure of the Japanese maid—an ugly, gnarled idol with slitted eyes. She withdrew when he arose to receive the unaffected homage of his hosts. He was curious. Monsieur Pelletier, who looked like a Brazilian parrot in beak and hue, cackled:—

“That’s Cilli, our Japanese. She was born in Germany, and is my niece’s governess. Quite musical, too, I should say so. Just look at my two Maltese cats! I call them Tristan and Isolde because they make noises in the night. Don’t you *loathe* Wagner?”

It was time to go. Enamoured, Davos took

VISIONARIES

his leave, promising to call the next forenoon before he went back to Ischl. He held her fingers for a brief moment and longed to examine their tips,—the artist still struggled to subdue the man,—but the pressure he received was so unmistakable that he hurried away, fearing to betray his emotion. He hovered in the vicinity of the house, longing for more music. He was disappointed. For a full hour he wandered through the dusty lanes in the faded light of an old moon. When he reached his chamber, it was long past one o'clock; undaunted, his romantic fervour forced him to the window, and he watched the shining lake. He fell asleep thinking of Constantia. But he dreamed of Cilli, the Japanese maid with the hideous eyes.

III

Not only that morning, but every morning for two weeks, did Marco Davos visit Alt-Aussee. He came down from Ischl on the earliest train, and some nights he stopped at the hotel near his new friends. After a few visits he saw little of the father and uncle, and he was not sorry—they were old bores with their archaic anecdotes of dead pianists. Two maniacs on the subject of music, Davos wished them to the devil after he had known them twenty-four hours. His passion had reached the acute key. He could not eat or drink in normal fashion, and no sooner had he left the girl than the sky became sombre,

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

his pulse weakened, and he longed to return to her side to tell her something he had forgotten. He did this several times, and hesitated in his speech, reddened, and left her, stumbling over the grass like a lame man. Never such a crazy wooer, never a calmer maiden. She looked unutterable sentiment, but spoke it not.

When he teased her about her music, she became a statue. She was too timid to play before artists; her only master had been her father. Once more he had heard the piano as he returned unexpectedly, and almost caught her; he saw her at the instrument, but some instinct must have warned her that she was being spied upon. She stopped in the middle of a phrase from a Mendelssohn song, and even to his prejudiced ears her touch had seemed commonplace. Yet he loved her all the more despite her flat refusal to play. The temptation to his excited artistic temperament was removed. He played, often, gloriously. His nerves were steel. This was a cure his doctor had not foreseen. What did it matter, anyhow?—he was near Constantia daily, and the sunshine was royal. Only—why did her relatives absent themselves so obstinately! She told him, with her secret smile, that she had scolded them for talking so much; but when he played they were never far away, she assured him. Nor was the Japanese woman, Cilli—what a name! A nickname given by Constantia in her babyhood. Cilli was a good soul. He hoped so—her good-

VISIONARIES

ness was not apparent. She had a sneering expression as he played. He never looked up from the keyboard that he did not encounter her ironical gaze. She was undoubtedly interested. Her intensity of pose proved it; but there was no sympathy in her eyes. And she had a habit of suddenly appearing in door or window, and always behind her mistress. She ended by seriously annoying him, though he did not complain. It was too trivial.

One afternoon he unfolded his novel views on touch. If the action of the modern piano-forte could be made as sensitive in its response as the fingerboard of a fiddle. . . . Constantia listened with her habitual gravity, but he knew that she was bored. Then he shifted to the subject of fingers. He begged to be allowed the privilege of examining hers. At first she held back, burying her hand in the old Mechlin lace flounce of her sleeves. He coaxed. He did not attempt to conceal his chagrin when he finally saw her fingers. They were pudgy, good-humoured, fit to lift a knife and fork, or to mend linen. They did not match her cameo-like face, and above all they did not reveal the musical soul he knew her to possess. For the first time since he met her she gave evidence of ill humour. She sharply withdrew her hand from his, and as she did so a barbaric croon was heard, a sort of triumphant wailing, and Constantia, without making an excuse, hurriedly left the room. The singing stopped.

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

"It's that devil of a Japanese woman," he muttered testily. He waited for nearly an hour, and in a vile temper took up his hat and stick and went away. Decidedly this was his unlucky day, he grumbled, as he reached the water. He saw Grabowski and Pelletier, arm in arm, trudging toward the villa, but contrived to evade them. In ten minutes he found himself spying on the house he had quitted. He skirted a little private way back of the villa, and to his amazement father, uncle, and Constantia came out and hailed the omnibus which travelled hourly to Aussee. Davos was furious. He did not risk following them, for he realized he had been treated shabbily. His wrath softened as he reflected; perhaps Constantia, agitated by his rudeness,—had he been rude?—persuaded her family to follow him to Ischl. The sky cleared. That was the solution—Marco Davos straightened himself—his pride was no longer up in arms. Poor child—she was so easily wounded! How he loved her!

His body trembled. He could not believe he was awake. Incredible music was issuing from behind the closed blinds of the villa. Music! And the music he had overheard that first night. But Constantia had just gone away; he had seen her. There must be some mistake, some joke. No, no, by another path she had managed to get back to the house. Ay! but what playing. Again came that purling rush of notes, those unison passages, as if one gigantic hand grasped

VISIONARIES

them — so perfect was the tonal accord. He did not hesitate. At a bound he was in the corridor and pushed open the door of the drawing-room. . . .

At first the twilit room blinded him. Then to his disgust and terror he saw the ape-like features of the squat Japanese governess. She sat at the piano, her bilious skin flushed by the exertion of playing.

"You — you!" he barely managed to stammer. She did not reply, but preserved the immobility of a carved idol.

"You are a wonderful artiste," he blurted, going to her. She stolidly answered:—

"The Japanese have the finest sense of touch in the world. I was once a pupil of Karl Tau-sig." Involuntarily he bowed his head to the revered name of the one man he had longed to hear. Then his feelings almost strangled him; his master passion asserted itself.

"Your fingers, your fingers — let me see them," he hoarsely demanded. With a malicious grin she extended her hands — he groaned enviously. Yes, they were miracles of sculpture, miracles of colour and delicacy, the slender tips well-nigh prehensile in their cunning power. And the fingers of Constantia, of his love, of the woman who loved Chopin — that Chopin whose first passion was for her grandmother, the opera singer Constantia Gladowska!

The knowledge of her cruel deception crept into his consciousness. He was chilled for

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED CHOPIN

several seconds. Grief at his lost love, implacable anger at her trickery, crowded into his unhappy brain. But he only bowed to Cilli, and summoning all his will he politely said:—

“It is quite true that when the Japanese choose to play the piano, we Europeans must shut up shop.” He hurried out to the road and walked desperately. . . .

The next morning, as he nervously paced the platform of the Ischl railway station, he encountered his old friend Alfred Brünfeld, the jovial Viennese pianist.

“Hullo!”

“Hullo!”

“Not going back to Vienna?”

“Yes—I’m tired of the country.”

“But, man, you are pale and tired. Have you been studying up here after your doctor bade you rest?” The concern in Brünfeld’s voice touched Davos. He shook his head, then be-thought himself of something.

“Alfred, you are acquainted with everybody in Europe. How is it you never told me about that strange Grabowski crowd—you know, the granddaughter of Chopin’s first love?” Brünfeld looked at him with instant curiosity.

“You also?” he said. The young man blushed. After *that* he could never forgive! The other continued:—

“Granddaughter, fiddlesticks! They are not Poles, those Grabowskis, but impostors. Their real name is—is—” Davos started.

VISIONARIES

“What, you have met them?”

“Yes, the stupid father, the odious uncle, the fair Constantia—what a meek saint!—and that diabolical Japanese, who plays the piano like a house on fire.” Tears came to the eyes of Marco Davos.

“Did they—I mean, did *she* take you in, too?”

“Here, at Ischl, last summer,” was the grim reply.

XVIII

THE TUNE OF TIME

FERVAL returned to Rouen after a fatiguing trip down the Seine as far as Croisset, the old home of Gustave Flaubert. Here he viewed, not without a dismal sense of fame and its futility, the little garden-house in which the masterpieces of the great Frenchman had been conceived in joy and executed in sorrow. He met the faithful Colange, one-time attendant of Flaubert, and from him learned exacerbating details of the novelist's lonesome years; so he was in a mood of irritation as he went ashore near the Boreldieu Bridge and slowly paced toward his hotel. He loved this Norman Rouen, loved the battered splendour of Nôtre-Dame Cathedral, loved the church of Saint-Ouen—that miracle of the Gothic, with its upspringing turrets, its portal as perfect as a Bach fugue. And in the Solferino Garden he paid his tribute of flowers at the monuments of Maupassant and Flaubert. Ferval was modern in his tastes; he believed nothing in art was worth the while which did not date from the nineteenth century.

Deplorably bored, he passed his hotel on the

VISIONARIES

Quai and turned into the Rue Jeanne d'Arc, which led by the façade of the Palais de Justice. He had studied it carefully, and it did not, this dull afternoon in September, hold his interest long ; he sauntered on, not feeling strong enough to light a cigarette. Decidedly, Rouen was become tiresome. He would go back to Paris by the evening train—or to Dieppe, thence to London, on the morning boat. Presently he found himself nearing the Porte de la Grosse Horloge. Through its opening poured vivacious working girls and men in blouse and cap, smoking, chattering, gesticulating. It was all very animated, and the wanderer tried to enjoy the picture. Then over against the crenellated wall, under the tablet bearing the quaint inscription picked out in choice Latin, Ferval saw a tall girl. Her bare head would not have marked her in a crowd where motley prevailed ; it was her pose that attracted him,—above all, her mediæval face, with its long, drooping nose which recalled some graven image of Jean Goujon. Her skin was tanned ; her hair, flame-coloured, was confined by a classic fillet ; her eyes, Oriental in fulness, were light blue—Ferval had crossed to the archway as if expecting some one. Young, robust, her very attitude suggested absolute health ; yet her expression was so despairing, her eyes so charged with misery, that involuntarily he felt in his pocket

THE TUNE OF TIME

for money. And then he saw that in her hand she held a tambourine. She wore a faded uniform of the Salvation Army.

Suddenly an extraordinary noise was heard; music, but of such a peculiar and excruciating quality that the young man forgot his neighbour and wondered what new pain was in store for his already taut nerves. The shops emptied, children stopped their games, and the Quarter suspended its affairs to welcome the music. Ferval heard rapturous and mocking remarks. "Baki, Baki, the human orchestra!" cried one gossip to another. And the reverberating music swelled, multifarious and amazing as if a military band from piccolo to drum were about to descend the highway. A clatter and bang, a sweet droning and shrill scraping, and then an old man proudly limped through the gateway of the Great Clock. This was the conjurer, this white-haired fellow, who, with fife, cymbals, bells, concertinas,—he wore two strapped under either arm,—at times fiddler, made epileptic music as he quivered and danced, wriggled, and shook his venerable skull. The big drum was fastened to his back, upon its top were placed cymbals. On his head he wore a pavilion hung with bells that pealed when he twisted or nodded his long, yellow neck. He carried a weather-worn fiddle with a string or two missing, while a pipe that might have been a clarinet years before, now emitted but cackling tones from his thin lips, through which shone a few fang-

VISIONARIES

like teeth. By some incomprehensible coördination of muscular movements he contrived to make sound simultaneously his curious armoury of instruments, and the whistling, screeching, scratching, drumming, wheezing, and tinkling of metal were appalling. But it was rhythmic, and at intervals the edge of a tune could be discerned, cutting sharply through the dense cloud of vibrations, like the prow of a boat cleaving the fog. Baki, his face red and swollen by his exertions, moved to the spot where waited the girl.

"*Ai, Debora!*" cried a boy, "here's the old man. Pass the plate, pass the plate!" To his amazement, though he could give no reason for the feeling, Ferval saw the girl go from group to group, her tambourine outstretched, begging for coppers. Once she struck an insulting youth across the face, but when she reached Ferval and met his inquiring look, she dropped her eyes and did not ask for alms. A red-headed Sibyl, he thought discontentedly, a street beggar, the daughter of an old ruffian. And as he walked away rapidly he remembered her glance, in which there lurked some touch of antique pride and wrath.

II

Rouen lay below him, a violet haze obscuring all but the pinnacles of its churches. The sinking sun had no longer power to pierce this

THE TUNE OF TIME

misty gulf, at the bottom of which hummed the busy city ; but Ferval saw through rents in the twirling, heat-laden atmosphere the dim shapes of bridges mirrored by the water beneath him ; and once the two islands apparently swept toward him, a blur of green ; while at the end of the valley, framed by hills, he seemed to discern the odd-looking *Transbordeur* spanning the Seine.

For twenty-four hours he had not ceased thinking of the girl with the tambourine, of her savage, sullen grace, her magnificent poise and strange glance. He had learned at his hotel that she was called "*Debora la folle*," and that she was the daughter of the still crazier Baki. Was she some sort of a gypsy, or a Continental version of *Salvation Army* lass ? No one knew. Each year, at the beginning of autumn, the pair wandered into Rouen, remained a few weeks, and disappeared. Where ? Paris, perhaps, or Italy or — *là bas !* The shoulder-shrugging proved that Baki and his daughter were not highly regarded by reputable citizens of Rouen, though the street people followed their music and singing as long as it lasted. Singing ? queried Ferval ; does the woman sing ?

He became more interested. His visits to the country where Pissarro painted and Flaubert wrote revealed other possibilities besides those purely artistic ones in which this amateur of fine shades and sensations delighted. He did not deny, on the esplanade where behind him

VISIONARIES

stood Bonsecours and the monument of Jeanne d'Arc, that souvenirs of the girl had kept his eyelids from closing during the major portion of the night. To cool his brain after the mid-day breakfast he had climbed the white, dusty, and winding road leading to the Monumental Cemetery wherein, true Flaubertian, he had remained some moments uncovered at the tomb of the master. Now he rested, and the shade of the trees mellowed the slow dusk of a Rouen evening.

A deep contralto voice boomed in his ears. As he had seen but a scant half-dozen persons during the afternoon on the heights, Ferval was startled from his dreams. He turned. Sitting on a bank of green was the girl. Her hands were clasped and she spoke carelessly to her father, who, unharnessed from his orchestra, appeared another man. Rapidly Ferval observed his striking front, his massive head with the long, white curls, the head of an Elijah disillusioned of his mission. He, too, was sitting, but upright, and his arm was raised with a threatening gesture as if in his desolating anger he were about to pronounce a malediction upon the vanishing twilit town. Ferval moved immediately, as he did not care to be caught spying upon his queer neighbours. He was halted by their speech. It was English. His surprise was so unaffected that he turned back and went up to the two and bade them good-day. At once he saw that the girl recognized him;

THE TUNE OF TIME

the father dropped his air of grandeur and put on the beggar's mask. What an actor! thought Ferval, at the transformation. "Would the good gentleman please—?"

The girl plucked at her father's arm imploringly. With her grave, cold expression she answered the other's salutation and fixed him with her wonderful eyes so inquiringly that Ferval began a hasty explanation. "English was rarely spoken here . . . and then the pleasure of the music!" The old man burst into scornful laughter.

"The music!" he exclaimed. "The music!" echoed his daughter. Ferval wished himself down in Rouen. But he held his position.

"Yes," he continued, "your music. It interested me. And now I find you speaking my own tongue. I must confess that I am curious, that my curiosity has warrant." Thus was he talking to beggars as if they were his social equals. Unconsciously the tone he adopted had been forced upon him by the bearing of his companions, above all by their accent, that of cultivated folk. Who and what were they? The musician no longer smiled.

"You are a music-lover, monsieur?" he asked in a marked French *patois*.

"I love music, and I am extremely engaged by your remarkable combination of instruments," answered Ferval. Baki regarded his wretched orchestra on the grass, then spoke to his daughter.

VISIONARIES

"Debora," he said in English, and his listener wondered if it were Celtic or Scotch in its unusual intonations, "Debora, you must sing something for the gentleman. He loves our art," — there was indescribable pathos in this phrase, — "so sing something from Purcell, Brahms, or Richard Strauss."

These words were like the sting of hail; they seemed to drop from the sky, so out of key were they with the speaker's ragged clothes and the outlandish garb of his daughter. Purcell! Brahms! Strauss! What could these three composers mean to such outcasts? Believing that he was the victim of a mystification, Ferval waited, his pulses beating as if he had been running too hard. The girl slowly moved her glorious eyes in his direction; light as they were in hue, their heavy, dark lashes gave them a fantastic expression — bright flame seen through the shadow of smoke. He felt his own dilating as she opened her throat and poured out a broad, sonorous stream of sound that resolved into Von ewiger Liebe by Brahms. He had always loved deep-voiced women. Had he not read in the Talmud that Lilith, Adam's first wife, was low of voice? And this beggar-maid? Maybe a masquerading singer with a crazy father! What else could mean such art wasted on the roads, thrown in the faces of a rabble! Ferval kindled with emotion. Here was romance. Brahms and his dark song under the bowl of the troubled blue sky strongly affected him. He took the lean,

THE TUNE OF TIME

brown hand of the singer and kissed it fervently. She drew back nervously, but her father struck her on the shoulder chidingly.

"A trifle too dreary," he rumbled in his heavy bass. "Now, Purcell for the gentleman, and may he open his heart and his purse for the poor."

"Father," she cried warningly, "we are not beggars, *now!*" She turned supplicatingly to the young man and made a gesture of dismissal. He gently shook his head and pretended that he was about to leave, though he felt that his feet were rooted in the earth, his power of willing gone.

"Ay, ay, my girl!" continued the musician, "you can sing as well as the best of them, only you love your sinful old father so much that you have laid aside your ambitions, to follow him in his pilgrimage of expiation about this wicked globe. Ah, sir, if you but knew—I *will* speak, Debora, for he is a gentleman and a lover of music! If you but knew our history, you would not be surprised at us. Have ye ever been in Wales?"

Ferval stumbled in his answer. It was overlooked; the old man continued: "If ye have, ye must have heard of the sin-eaters. I am one of them, I am an eater of sin—"

Again the girl exclaimed, this time piteously, "Oh, father, remember your vow!"

"Poor lass! Yes, I was a doer of evil, and I became an eater of sin. Some day my sins will

VISIONARIES

be forgiven — this is my penance.” He pointed to his instruments. Ferval kept silence. He feared a word would blow away the cobweb foundations of the narrative. The girl had turned and was watching a young tilted moon which with a single star made silvery dents low in the western horizon.

“I am an eater of sin. We still have a few such in Wales. They put a piece of bread and cheese on the breast of a dead man and when the sin-eater eats it, the sins of the dead are passed into the bread and cheese and the soul of the dead is shrived of them. Ay, ay, but it’s a grave duty, my friend, to take upon your own soul the crime of another. If you are free from sin yourself, you may walk through life a brave creature; but . . . I took his sins, sins, the sins of the wickedest composer of our century, God rest his soul. And for the wicked things he put into his symphonies I must march through life playing on this terrible collection of instruments the Tune of Time—” His daughter faced him.

“Father, we must go; you are only keeping the gentleman.” Again she signalled Ferval, but he disregarded her warning. He would not stir. The story and the man who told it, a prophet shorn of his heaven-storming powers, fascinated him.

“I took his sins to myself and they were awful. Once every night I play the Tune of Time in which the wickedness of the dead man

THE TUNE OF TIME

is spread out like dry rot in a green field. This man kept his genius so long stagnant that it decayed on his hands, and then into his pestilential music he poured his poison, and would have made the world sick. Oh, for delivery from the crushing transgressions of another! His name? Ah, but that is my secret! I ate his sin, and truth, my son, is stranger than theology! Listen!"

Before his daughter could check him he had hastily donned his armament of instruments and, tramping slowly the broad, smooth path, began playing. Ferval, much disappointed, was about to disappear, for he remembered the racking noises of the previous day. But this music, this Tune of Time! . . .

III

It was like the flare of lightning which illuminates strange regions beyond the borders of the soul. Ferval no longer heard, he felt; he felt no more, he saw. The white veil was torn asunder, and it showed him a melodious thunder-pool wherein tapering tiny bodies swam, whose eyes were the eyes of Debora. They split and coalesced into other creatures, and to the drummings of spheric harmonies resolved themselves scaly and monstrous. Never did they cease changing. As the music buzzed he saw the great ladder of life, the lowermost rungs resting in lakes of melted amber, the top threat-

VISIONARIES

ening the remotest rims of the universe. And still the Tune of Time whirred on, as facet after facet of the Infinite wheeled toward creation. Numberless legions of crumpled nightmare shapes modulated into new, familiar forms. Ferval saw plasmic dew become anthropoidal apes, fiercely roaming primeval forests in search of prey. The music mounted ever upward, for the Tune of Time is the Tune of Love—love and its inseparable shadow, hate, fashion the firmament. The solid, circular earth shivered like a mighty harp under this lyric burden of love. The very stars sported in their orbits; and from the fulgurating ovens of the Milky Way there shot forth streams of audible light that touched the heart-strings of the hairy, erect primates and set them chanting; thus were the souls born which crowned them men. This space-bridging music ranged from sun to sun, and its supernatural symphony had no beginning and never shall end.

But the magician or devil who revealed this phantasmagoria of the Cosmos—how had he wrested from the Inane the Tune of Time that in a sequence of chromatic chords pictured the processes of the eternal energy? Was this his sin, the true sin against the Holy Ghost? How had he blundered upon the secret of the rhythmic engine which spun souls through the ages? No man could live after this terrific peep at the Ancient of Days. Debora's eyes peered into Ferval's, filled with the music that enmeshes.

THE TUNE OF TIME

And now sounded the apocalyptic trumpets even unto the glittering edges of eternity. . . .

Amid this vertiginous tempest of tones Debora danced the Dance of Space. She revolved in lenten movement to the lilt of the music, her eyes staring and full of broken lights. As her gaze collided with her companion's he saw a disk of many-coloured fire; and then her languorous gestures were transformed into shivering intensities. She danced like the wine-steeped Noah; she danced as danced David before the Ark of the Covenant. And she was Herodias pirouetting for the price of John's head, and her brow was wreathed with serpents. Followed the convulsive curvings of the Nautch and the opaque splendours of stately Moorish slaves. Debora threw her watcher into a frenzy of fear. He crouched under a sky that roofed him in with its menacing blackness; the orbs of the girl were shot with crescent lightnings. Alien in his desolation, he wondered if her solemn leaps, as the music dashed with frantic speed upon his ear-drums, signified the incarnation of Devi, dread slayer of men! The primal charmers affrighted his vision: Lilith, Ourania, Astarté, Ashtaroth, Belkis, Ishtar, Mylitta, Cotyutto, and many immemorial figures from before the Flood streamed by and melted into the woven paces of Debora — this new Jephtha's daughter dancing to her doom as her father fingered the Tune of Time. In the whirling patterns of her dance, Ferval discerned, though dimly, the Veil

VISIONARIES

of Maya, the veil of illusion called Space, on the thither side of which are embroidered the fugacious symbols of Time. . . .

. . . As the delirious music faltered and fainted, he watched the tragic eyes of Debora yellowing cat-like. His senses and imagination had been hypnotized by all this fracas and by the beauty of the girl. With such a mate and such formidable music, he could conquer the earth! His brain was afire with the sweetness of the odour that enveloped them, an odour as penetrating as the music of the nocturnal Chopin.

"Debora," he whispered, "you must never go away from me." She hung her head. The old man was not to be seen; the darkness had swallowed him. Ferval quietly passed his arm about the waist of the silent woman and slowly they walked in the tender night. She was the first to speak:—

"You did not hear a madman's story," she asserted in her clear, candid voice, which had for him the hue of a cleft pomegranate. "It is the history of my father's soul. It is his own sin he expiates."

"But you, you!" Ferval cried unsteadily. "Why must your life be sacrificed to gratify the bizarre egotism of such a—" He cut short the phrase, fearful of wounding her. He felt her body tremble and her arm contract. They reached the marble staircase of the Jeanne d'Arc memorial. She stopped him and burst forth:—

THE TUNE OF TIME

"Would you be willing to share his burden ?
Would you take upon your shoulders his sin ?
He may have committed the one unpardonable
sin, for he discovered the true philosopher's
stone, that can transmute metals, make moun-
tains nod, the stars to stop, and command the
throne of Jehovah—oh, what blasphemy has
been his in his daring music ! If he could per-
suade one other soul besides mine to help him,
he might be released from his woe. Will you be
that other ?"

She put this question as if she were proposing
a commonplace human undertaking. Ferval in
his confusion fancied that she was provoking
him to a declaration. To grasp his receding
reason he fatuously exclaimed :—

"Is this a Salvation Army fantasy ?"

With that she called out, in harsh resentful:
"Not salvation for you !"

She then thrust him from her so violently that
he tumbled backward down the steps to the very
bottom, where, unnerved by the ferocity of the
attack and his head bruised by the fall, he felt
his consciousness escape like gas from a punc-
tured balloon. When found the next morning,
he was barely covered by the old sin-eater's rags,
while near by was scattered the entire orchestra
of that eloquent wizard. Shudderingly he real-
ized that it had been no dream ; shudderingly
he wondered if upon his soul had been shifted
the unknown crime of the fanatic ! The witch-
ing, enigmatic Debora haunted his memory ;

VISIONARIES

and with dismay he recalled the blistering vision evoked by the music, through which she had glided like some tremulous Lamia. Decidedly his imagination had carried him far. He cursed his easy credulity, he reviled his love of the exotic . . .

Ferval made inquiry of the authorities, but received little comfort. Salvation Army people they were not, this father and daughter; the tambourine, assumed garb, and prophet's beard had deceived him. Impostors! But of what incredible caliber, of what illusion-creating power! For years he could not see a Salvation Army girl without a sense of cerebral exaltation. If he could have met Debora again, he would have forgiven her sibylline deceptions, her father's chicanery. And how did they spin their web? Ferval, student of the occult, greedy of metaphysical problems, at first set it down to Indian Yogi magic. But the machinery—the hideously discordant human orchestra, the corybantic dancing! No, he rejected the theory. Music is sometimes hypnotic, but not such music; dancing is the most alluring of the spatial arts, and Debora's miming was a delight to the eye; but could it have so obscured his judgments as to paint upon the canvas of his fancy those prodigious frescoes of time and space?

In the iron solitude of his soul he tortured himself with these questions. His stupor lasted for days—was it the abrupt fall or was

THE TUNE OF TIME

it the result of his absinthe-like dreams? He was haunted by an odour that assailed his brain like one tune persistently played. The odour! Whence did it come with its sickly sweetness? Perhaps therein lay the secret of his hallucinating visions. Perhaps a drug had perverted his brain. But within the week the dangerous perfume had become dissipated, and with it vanished all hope of solving the riddle. Oh, to sense once more the enchantments of its fragrance, once more revel in the sublimated intoxication of mighty forces weaving at the loom of life! By the cadences of what infernal art had he been vouchsafed a glimpse of the profiles of the gods? Henceforth Ferval became a lover of shadows.

XIX

NADA

THE tenderness of the growing night disquieted the dying woman.

“Aline!” she called. But it was only the name that reverberated within the walls of her brain, harrowed by fever. A soft air rustled the drawn curtains of lawn; and on the dressing table the two little lamps fluttered in syncopated sympathy. One picture the room held. It was after a painting by Goya, and depicted a sneering skeleton scrawling on his dusty tomb, with a bony fore-finger, the sinister word, *Nada*—nothing! The perturbation of the woman increased, though physical power seemed denied her. “Aline, my child!” This time a clucking sound issued from her throat.

The girl went to the bedside and gently fanned. Her aunt wagged her head negatively. “No, no!” she stuttered. Aline stopped, and kneeling, took the sick hands in her own. Their eyes met and Aline, guided by the glance, looked over at the picture with its sardonic motto.

“Shall I take it away, Aunt Mary?” The elder woman closed her eyes as if to shut out the ghoulish mockery. Then Aline saw the tabouret that stood between the windows—it

NADA

was burdened with magnolias in a deep white bowl.

"Do you wish them nearer?"

"No, no," murmured her aunt. Her eyes brightened. She pushed her chin forward, and the young girl removed the flowers, knowing that their odour had become oppressive. She was not absent more than a few seconds. As she returned the maid touched her arm.

"The gentlemen are waiting below, miss. They won't leave until they see you."

"How can I go now? Send them away, send them away!"

"Yes, miss; but I told them what you said this afternoon about the danger of Holiest Mother—"

"Hush! she is calling." Aline slipped into the room on hurried feet, her eyes dilated, her hair in anxious disorder. But the invalid made no signal. She lay with closed eyelids, the contraction of her nostrils a faint proclamation of life. Again the niece took her place at the headboard, and with folded fingers watched the whispering indications of speedy flight. The maid soon beckoned her from a narrowed door. Aline joined her.

"They say that if you don't go down, they will come up."

"Who says?" was the stern query.

"The Second Reader and the Secretary. I think you had better see them; they both look worried. Really I do, Miss Allie."

VISIONARIES

"Very well, Ellen ; but you must stay here, and if Holiest Mother makes the slightest move, touch the bell. I'll not be gone five minutes."

Without arranging her hair or dress, Aline opened the folding doors of the drawing-room. Only the centre lamp was lighted, but she recognized the two men. They were sitting together, and arose as she entered. The burly Second Reader wore a dismayed countenance. His cheeks were flabby, his eyes red. The other was a timid little man who never had anything to say.

"How is Holiest Mother?" asked the Reader.

"Dying."

"Oh, Sister Aline ! Why such a blunt way of putting it? *She* may be exchanging her earthly garb for a celestial one — but die ! We do not acknowledge death in the Church of the New Faith." He paused and blandly stroked his huge left hand, covered with red down.

"Holiest Mother, my aunt, has not an hour to live," was the cool response of the girl. "If you have no further question, I must ask you to excuse me; I am needed above." She stepped to the door.

"Wait a moment, sister ! Not so fast. The situation is serious. Hundreds of thousands of the faithful depend on our report of this—of this sad event. We may tell them that the female pope of our great religion"—he bent his big neck reverently—"was wafted to her heavenly abode by the angels. But there are

NADA

the officers of the law, the undertaker, the cemetery people, to be considered. Shall we acknowledge that our founder has died like any other human — in bed, of a fever? And who is to be her successor? Has she left a will?"

"Poor Aunt Mary!" muttered the girl.

"It must be a woman, will or no will," continued the Second Reader, in the tone of a conqueror making terms with a stricken foe. "Now Aline, sister, you are the nearest of kin. You are a fervent healer. *You are the Woman.*"

"How can you stand there heartlessly plotting such things and a dying woman in the house?" Aline's voice was metallic with passion. "You care only for the money and power in our church. I refuse to join with you in any such scheme. Aunt Mary will die. She will name her successor. Then it will be time to act. Have you forgotten her last words to the faithful?" She pointed to a marble tablet above the fireplace, which bore this astounding phrase: "My first and forever message is one and eternal." Nothing more, — but the men cowered before the sublime wisdom uttered by a frail woman, wisdom that had started the emotional machinery of two continents.

"But, great God! Miss Aline, you mustn't go off and leave us in this fix." Drops of water stood on the forehead of the Second Reader. His hands dropped to his side with a gesture of despair. His companion kept to the corner, a scared being.

VISIONARIES

"You know as well as I do that *somebody* has to take the throne seat after — after your Aunt Mary dies — I mean, after Holiest Mother is translated to eternity. Ask her, beg her, for some advice. We can't let the great undertaking go to pieces — "

"You have little faith, brother," replied Aline. "If that message means anything, then the New Faith will take care of itself — "

"Yes, yes, I know," was the testy interruption; "but the world is not so easily led in matters of religion. The message, as you say, is divine; but it may sound like meaningless twaddle to the world at large. If we are to heal mankind and dispel the heresy of disease and death, why can't Holiest Mother save herself? Mind you, I am looking at this thing with the eyes of the sceptics — "

"You are an unbeliever, a materialist, yourself," was the bold retort. "Do as you please, but you can't drag me into your money calculations." The swift slam of the door left them to their fears.

Her aunt, sitting as upright as a candle, was conducting an invisible orchestra when Aline returned. The frightened maid tried to hold the lean, spasmodic arms as they traced in the air the pompous rhythm of a march that moved on silent funereal pinions through the chamber. The woman stared threateningly at the picture on the wall, the picture of the skeleton which had come from nothingness to reveal nothingness to

NADA

the living. The now distraught girl, her nerves crисped by her doubts, threw herself upon the bed, her fears sorely knocking at her heart.

“Aunt, Aunt Mary — Holiest Mother, in Christ’s name, in the name of the New Faith, tell me before you go — tell me what is to become of our holy church after you die — after you pass over to the great white light. Is it all real? Or is it only a dream, *your* beautiful dream? — What is the secret truth? Or — or — is there no secret — no —” her voice was cracked by sobs. The stately, soundless music was waved on by her aunt. Then Holiest Mother fell back on her pillow, and with a last long glance at the picture, she pointed, with smiling irony at the picture.

Nada, Nada . . .

The night died away in tender complicity with the two little lamps on the dressing table, and the sweet, thick perfume of magnolias modulated into acrid decay as day dawned. Below, the two men anxiously awaited the message from the dead. And they saw again upon the marble tablet above the fireplace her cryptic wisdom : —

“My first and forever message is one and eternal.”

XX

PAN

For the Great God Pan is alive again.

— DEAN MANSEL.

I

THE handsome Hungarian kept his brilliant glance fixed upon Lora Crowne; she sat with her Aunt Lucas and Mr. Steyle at a table facing the orchestra. His eyes were not so large as black; the intensity of their gaze further bewildered the young woman, whose appearance that evening at the famous café on the East Side was her initial one. The heat, the bristling lights, the terrific appealing clamour of the gypsy band, set murmuring the nerves of this impressionable girl. And the agility of the *cymbalom* player, his great height, clear skin, and piercing eyes, quite enthralled her.

"It is the gypsy dulcimer, Lora; I read all about it in Liszt's book on gypsy music," said Aunt Lucas, in an airy soprano.

Mr. Steyle was impressed. Lora paid no attention, but continued to gaze curiously at the antics of the player, who hammered from his instrument of wire shivering, percussive music. With flexible wrists he swung the felt-covered

PAN

mallets that brought up such resounding tones ; at times his long, apelike arms would reach far asunder and, rolling his eyes, he touched the extremes of his *cymbalom* ; then he described furious arpeggios, punctuated with a shrill tattoo. And the crazy music defiled by in a struggling squad of chords ; but Áfpad Vihary never lifted his eyes from Lora Crowne. . . .

The vibration ceased. Its withdrawal left the ear-drums buzzing with a minute, painful sensation, like that of moisture rapidly evaporating upon the naked skin. A battalion of tongues began to chatter as the red-faced waiters rushed between the tables, taking orders. It was after eleven o'clock, and through the swinging doors passed a throng of motley people, fanning, gossiping, bickering — all eager and thirsty. Clarence Steyle pointed out the celebrities with conscious delight. Over yonder — that man with the mixed gray hair — was a composer who came every night for inspiration, — musical and otherwise, Clarence added, with a laugh. And there was the young and well-known decadent playwright who wore strangling high collars and transposed all his plays from French sources ; he lisped and was proud of his ability to dramatize the latest mental disease. And a burglar who had written a famous book on the management of children during hot weather sat meekly resting before a solitary table.

The leader of the Hungarian band was a gypsy who called himself Alfassy Janos, though

VISIONARIES

he lived on First Avenue, in a flat the door of which bore this legend: *Jacob Aron*. The rest of the band seemed gypsy. Who is the *cymbalom* player? That is not difficult to answer; the programme gives it.

"There you are, Miss Lora."

She looked. "Oh, what a romantic name! He must be a count at least."

"Lora, dear, gypsies never bear titles," remarked Aunt Lucas, patronizingly.

"How about the Abbé Liszt?" triumphantly asked her charge.

Aunt Lucas laughed coldly. "Liszt was Hungarian, not Romany. But your artist with the drumsticks certainly is distinguished-looking. If he only would not wear that odious scarlet uniform. I wonder why he does not sit down, like the rest of his colleagues."

Árpád Vihary leaned against the panelled wall, his brow puckered in boredom, his long black mustaches drooping from sheer discouragement. His was a figure for sculpture—a frame powerfully modelled, a bisque complexion. Thin as a cedar sapling, he preserved such an immovable attitude that in the haze of the creamy atmosphere he seemed a carved, marmoreal image rather than a young man with devouring eyes.

The three visitors ate sandwiches and pretended to relish Munich beer served in tall stone mugs. Aunt Lucas, who was shaped like a 'cello, made more than a pretence of sipping;

PAN

she drank one entirely, regretting the exigencies of chaperonage: to ask for more might shock the proper young man.

"It's horrid here, after all," she remarked discontentedly. "So many people — *such* people — and very few nice ones. The Batsons are over there, Lora; but then you don't care for them. O dear, I wish the band would strike up again."

It did. A vicious swirl of colour and dizzy, dislocated rhythms prefaced the incantations of the Czardas. Instantly the eating, gabbling crowd became silent. Alfassy Janos magnetized his hearers with cradling, caressing movements of his fiddle. He waved like tall grass in the wind; he twisted snakewise his lithe body as he lashed his bow upon the screaming strings; the resilient tones darted fulgorantly from instrument to instrument. After chasing in circles of quicksilver, they all met with a crash; and the whole tonal battery, reënforced by the throbbing of Afpad Vihary's dulcimer, swept through the suite of rooms from ceiling to sanded floor. It was no longer enchanting music, but sheer madness of the blood; sensual and warlike, it gripped the imagination as these tunes of old Egypt, filtered through savage centuries, reached the ears. Lora trembled in the gale that blew across the Puzta. She imagined a determined Hungarian prairie, over which dashed disordered centaurs brandishing clubs, driving before them a band of satyrs and leaping fauns. The hoofed men struggled. At their front was a monster with

VISIONARIES

a black goat-face and huge horns; he fought fiercely the half-human horses. The sun, a thin scarf of light, was eclipsed by earnest clouds; the curving thunder closed over the battle; the air was flame-sprinkled and enlaced by music; and most melancholy were the eyes of the defeated Pan—the melancholy eyes of Árpád Vihary. . . .

Aunt Lucas was scandalized. "Do you know, Lora, that the impudent dulcimer virtuoso"—she prided herself on her musical terms—"actually stared you out of countenance during the entire Czardas?" And she could have added that her niece had returned the glance unflinchingly.

Mr. Steyle noticed Lora's vacant regard when he addressed her and insisted on getting her away from the dangerous undertow of this "table d'hôte music," as he contemptuously called it. He summoned the waiter.

Lora shed her disappointment. "Oh, let's wait for the *cymbalom* solo," she frankly begged.

Her aunt was unmoved. "Yes, Mr. Steyle, we had better go; the air is positively depressing. These slumming parties are delightful if you don't overdo them—but the people!" Up went her lorgnon.

They soon departed. Lora did not dare to look back until she reached the door that opened on the avenue; as she did so her vibrant gaze collided with the Hungarian's. She determined to see him again.

PAN

II

Nice Brooklyn girls always attend church and symphony concerts. This dual custom is considered respectable and cultured. Lora's parents during their lifetime never missed the Theodore Thomas concerts and the sermons of a certain famous local preacher; but there were times when the young woman longed for Carmen and the delights of fashionable Bohemia. Carefully reared by her Aunt Lucas, she had nevertheless a taste for gypsy bands and "Gyp's" novels. She read the latter translated, much to the disedification of her guardian, who was a linguist and a patron of the fine arts. This latter clause included subscriptions to the Institute Course and several scientific journals. If Lora were less romantic, all would be well. Once the careful chaperon had feared music and its disturbing influences; but after she had read an article about its healing effect upon the insane she felt that it could work no evil in Lora; indeed, it was an elevating art. She was fond of music herself, and, as dancing was strictly tabooed, there seemed little likelihood of the noble art of "sweet concordance"—Aunt Lucas had picked this quotation up somewhere—doing mischief to her impressionable niece.

Nearly all dwelling-houses look alike in Brooklyn, even at midday. The street in which the Crownes lived was composed of conven-

VISIONARIES

tional brown-stone buildings and English basements. Nielje, the Dutch maid, stood at the half-opened door, regarding with suspicion the big, dark man who had pulled the bell so violently. Aunt Lucas was in New York at the meeting of a society devoted to Ethical Enjoyment. Though Nielje had been warned secretly of an expected visitor, this wild-looking young man with long black hair, wearing a flaring coat of many colours and baggy Turkish trousers, gave her a shock. Why did he come to the basement as if he were one of the cook's callers? She paused. Then the door was shoved in by a muscular arm, and she was pushed against the wall.

"Don't try that again, man," she protested.

He answered her in gibberish. "Mees, Mees Lora," he repeated.

"Ach!" she exclaimed.

Árpád Vihary gloomily followed her into the dining-room, where Lora stood trembling. This was the third time she had met the Hungarian, and fearing Prospect Park,—after two timid walks there, under the fiery-fingered leaves of early autumn,—she had been prevailed upon to invite Árpád to her home. She regretted her imprudence the moment he entered. All his footlight picturesqueness vanished in the cold, hard light of an unromantic Brooklyn breakfast-room. He seemed like a clumsy circus hero as he scraped his feet over the parquetry and attempted to kiss her hand. She drew away

PAN

instantly and pointed to a chair. He refused to sit down; his pride seemed hurt.

Then he gave the girl an intense look, and she drew nearer.

"Oh, Afpad Vihary," she began.

He interrupted. "You do not love me now. Why? You told me you loved me, in the park, yesterday. I am a poor artist, that is the reason."

This speech he uttered glibly, and, despite the extraordinary pronunciation, she understood it. She took his long hand, the fingers amazed her. He bent them back until they touched his wrist, and was proud of their flexibility. He walked to the dining-table and tossed its cover-cloth on a chair. Upon his two thumbs he went around it like an acrobat. "Shall I hold you out with one arm?" he softly asked. Lora was vastly amused; this was indeed a courtship out of the ordinary—it pleased her exotic taste.

"Hungarian gypsies are very strong, are they not?" she innocently asked.

"I am not gypsy nor am I Hungarian; I am an East Indian. My family is royal. We are of the Rajpoot tribes called Ranas. My father once ruled Roorbunder."

Lora was amazed. A king's son, a Rana of Roorbunder! She became very sympathetic. Again she urged him to sit down.

"My nation never sits before a woman," he proudly answered.

"But I will sit beside you," she coaxed, push-

VISIONARIES

ing him to a corner. He resisted her and went to the window. Lora again joined him. The man piqued her. He was mysterious and very unlike Mr. Steyle — poor, sentimental Clarence, who melted with sighs if she but glanced at him ; and then, Clarence was too stout. She adored slender men, believing that when fat came in at the door love fled out of the window.

“They put me in a circus at Buda-Pesth,” remarked Árpád Vihary, as if he were making a commonplace statement about the weather.

She gave a little scream ; he regarded her with Oriental composure. “In a circus ! You ! Did you ride ?”

“I cannot ride,” he said. “I played in a cage all day.”

“Because you were wild ?” She then went into a fit of laughter. He was such a funny fellow, though his ardent gaze made her blush. So blond and pink was Lora that her friends called her Strawberry — a delicate compliment in which she delighted. It was this golden head and radiant face, with implacably blue eyes, that set the blood pumping into Árpád’s brain. When he looked at her, he saw sunlight.

“Do you know, you absurd prince, that when you played the Czardas the other night I seemed to see a vision of a Hungarian prairie, covered with fighting centaurs and satyrs ! I longed to be a *vivandière* among all those fauns. You were there — in the music, I mean — and you were big Pan — oh, so ugly and terrible !”

PAN

"Pan! That is a Polish title," he answered quite simply.

"Stupid! The great god Pan—don't you know your mythology? Haven't you read Mrs. Browning? He was the god of nature, of the woods. Even now, I believe you have ears with furry tips and hoofs like a faun."

He turned a sickly yellow.

"Anyhow, why did they put you in a cage? Were you a wild boy?"

"They thought so in Hungary."

"But why?"

He stared at her sorrowfully, and was about to empty his soul; but she turned away with a shudder.

"I know, I know," she whispered; "your hands — they are like the hands of —"

Aípad threw out his chest, and Lora heard with a curiosity that became nervous a rhythmic wagging sound, like velvet bruised by some dull implement. It frightened her.

"Do not be afraid of me," he begged. "You cannot say anything I do not know already." He walked to the door, and the girl followed him.

"Don't go, Afpad," she said with pretty remorse.

The fire blazed in his eyes and with a single swift grasp he seized her, holding her aloft like a torch. Lora almost lost consciousness. She had not counted upon such barbarous wooing, and, frightened, cried out, "Nielje, Nielje!"

Nielje burst into the room as if she had been

VISIONARIES

very near the keyhole. She was a powerful woman from Holland, who did not fear an army.

"Put her down!" she insisted, in her deepest gutturals. "Put her down, you brute, or I'll hurt you."

Lora jumped to the floor as Nielje struck with her broomstick at Árpád's retreating back. To the surprise of the women he gave a shriek of agony and ran to the door, Nielje following close behind. Lora, her eyes strained with excitement, did not stir; she heard a struggle in the little hall as the man fumbled at the basement entrance. Again he yelled, and then Lora rushed to the window. Nielje, on her knees, was being dragged across the grassy space in front of the house. She held on, seemingly, to the coat-tail of the frantic musician; only by a vigorous shove did he evade her persistent grasp and disappear.

A policeman with official aptness went leisurely by. Nielje flew into the house, locking and bolting the door. Her face was red as she rolled on the floor, her hands at her sides. Lora, alarmed, thought she was seriously hurt or hysterical from fright; but the laughter was too hearty and appealing.

"Oh, Meeslora! Oh, Meeslora!" she gasped. "He must be monkey-man—he has monkey tail!"

Lora could have fainted from chagrin and horror.

Had the great god Pan passed her way?

BOOKS BY JAMES HUNEKER

ICONOCLASTS: A Book of Dramatists

12mo. \$1.50 net. Postage, 12 cents

CONTENTS: Henrik Ibsen — August Strindberg — Henry Becque — Gerhart Hauptmann — Paul Hervieu — The Quintessence of Shaw — Maxim Gorky's *Nachtasyl* — Hermann Sudermann — Princess Mathilde's Play — Duse and D'Annunzio — Villiers de l'Isle Adam — Maurice Maeterlinck.

"His style is a little jerky, but it is one of those rare styles in which we are led to expect some significance, if not wit, in every sentence."

—G. K. CHESTERTON, in *London Daily News*.

"This is a valuable book. Its brilliancy as well as its depth of analysis, besides the mere bulk of information it contains, makes it so." — *Literary Digest*.

"No other book in English has surveyed the whole field so comprehensively." — *The Outlook*.

"A capital book, lively, informing, suggestive."
— *London Times Saturday Review*.

"Iconoclasts' is the most pungent dramatic work of the year and a brilliant addition to the literature of the stage." — *Boston Herald*.

"Eye-opening and mind-clarifying is Mr. Huneker's criticism; . . . no one having read that opening essay in this volume will lay it down until the final judgment upon Maurice Maeterlinck is reached." — *Boston Transcript*.

BOOKS BY JAMES HUNEKER

OVERTONES:
A Book of Temperaments

WITH FRONTISPICE PORTRAIT OF
RICHARD STRAUSS

12mo. \$1.25 net

CONTENTS: Richard Strauss — Parsifal: A Mystical Melodrama — Literary Men who loved Music (Balzac, Turgenieff, Daudet, etc.) — The Eternal Feminine — The Beethoven of French Prose — Nietzsche the Rhapsodist — Anarchs of Art — After Wagner, What? — Verdi and Boito.

"Musical criticism that is at once suggestive and simple, original and obvious. . . . Mr. Huneker as a critic of music has the faculty of giving one his impressions with unequivocal directness; and his impressions are always worth having. He is a suggestive writer, and in his point of view often original. His command of a facile pen and his feeling for vigorous and picturesque words make his criticism forceful and convincing."

— LEWIS M. ISAACS, in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

"The whole book is highly refreshing with its breadth of knowledge, its catholicity of taste, and its inexhaustible energy." — *Saturday Review, London*.

"In some respects Mr. Huneker must be reckoned the most brilliant of all living writers on matters musical." — *Academy, London*.

"No modern musical critic has shown greater ingenuity in the attempt to correlate the literary and musical tendencies of the nineteenth century."

— *Spectator, London*.

BOOKS BY JAMES HUNEKER

CHOPIN:
The Man and his Music

WITH ETCHED PORTRAIT

12mo. \$2.00

"We have not space to follow him through his luxurious jungle of interpretations, explanations, and suggestions; but we cordially invite our readers, especially our piano-playing readers, to do so."

— *The Saturday Review.*

"No pianist, amateur or professional, can rise from the perusal of his pages without a deeper appreciation of the new forms of beauty which Chopin has added, like so many species of orchids, to the musical flora of the nineteenth century." — *The Nation.*

"An admirable account of Chopin, considered both as a man and an artist. There is no doubt that this volume embodies the most adequate treatment of the subject that has yet appeared." — *New York Sun.*

"I think it not too much to predict that Mr. Huneker's estimate of Chopin and his works is destined to be the permanent one. He gives the reader the cream of the cream of all noteworthy previous commentators, besides much that is wholly his own. He speaks at once with modesty and authority, always with personal charm." — *Boston Transcript.*

BOOKS BY JAMES HUNEKER

MEZZOTINTS IN
MODERN MUSIC

BRAHMS, TSCHAIKOWSKY, CHOPIN
RICHARD STRAUSS, LISZT
AND WAGNER

12MO. \$1.50

"Mr. Huneker is, in the best sense, a critic; he listens to the music and gives you his impressions as rapidly and in as few words as possible; or he sketches the composers in fine, broad, sweeping strokes with a magnificent disregard for unimportant details. And as Mr. Huneker is, as I have said, a powerful personality, a man of quick brain and an energetic imagination, a man of moods and temperament — a string that vibrates and sings in response to music — we get in these essays of his a distinctly original and very valuable contribution to the world's tiny musical literature."

— J. F. RUNCIMAN, in *London Saturday Review*.

MELOMANIACS

12MO. \$1.50

CONTENTS: The Lord's Prayer in B — A Son of Liszt — A Chopin of the Gutter — The Piper of Dreams — An Emotional Acrobat — Isolde's Mother — The Rim of Finer Issues — An Ibsen Girl — Tannhäuser's Choice — The Red-Headed Piano Player — Brynhild's Immolation — The Quest of the Elusive — An Involuntary Insurgent — Hunding's Wife — The Corridor of Time — Avatar — The Wegstaffes give a Musicale — The Iron Virgin — Dusk of the Gods — Siegfried's Death — Intermezzo — A Spinner of Silence — The Disenchanted Symphony — Music the Conqueror.

"Improvisations, now frankly whimsical and now almost serious, of a writer who cares for music and has considerable insight into many of its mysteries, but has also too keen a sense of humor to be learnedly mysterious himself." — *New York Tribune*.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK



